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MORGANN'S ESSAY ON THE DRAMATIC CHARACTER OF SIR JOHN FALSTAFF

EDITED BY

WILLIAM ARTHUR GILL

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INTRODUCTION

Maurice Morgann was a man of some influence in politics and literature, though of too retiring a disposition to catch the eye of the general public. As an author he was always anonymous, and sometimes his reserve went further, as for instance when he refused a pressing demand for a second edition of the Falstaff essay, or when he strictly enjoined his executrix to destroy compositions of his which, according to an intelligent critic, 'would have planted a permanent laurel on his grave.' In politics again he seems to have preferred exercising his great abilities in other men's names to coming forward as his own spokesman. Such a nature is not likely to make much impression on contemporary records, and several important questions about Morgann's life are still unanswered.

Morgann was born in London in 1726 and died there in 1802. He is said to have come of 'an antient and respectable family in Wales', but beyond this we know nothing of his parent-

age; and the events of his youth and of the earlier part of his manhood are left to conjecture. At the age of thirty-five he emerges in the official lists of the 'Court and City Kalendar' as 'Weigher and Teller' at the Mint with a yearly salary 'for himself and clerk' of £142 10s.,—a position which he retained to the end of his life. A colleague of his at the Mint for many years was George Selwyn, as 'Surveyor of the Meltings and Clerk of the Irons', with a salary 'for himself and clerk' of £132 10s., and Selwyn's successor was the Hon. Spencer Perceval. The appointment to this sinecure proves that Morgann had influence of some sort, but throws little light on his occupations. In 1766, when he was forty, he became an Under-Secretary of State. He had somehow gained—how he had gained it is one of the unanswered questions—an uncommonly thorough knowledge of American affairs, and he was appointed 'Secretary of the American Department' under Lord Shelburne, then for the first time, at the age of twenty-nine, Secretary of State. In this office, and in troubled times, Morgann showed himself clear-sighted and liberal as well as accurately informed, and we know from memoranda of his addressed to his young chief and from the latter's course meanwhile that his views re-

ceived as much notice in the Government councils as Lord Shelburne was able to obtain for them. A friend of Morgann's has asserted that if 'his sollicitous and enlightened representations had experienced attention, the temporary and the abiding evils of the American contest would not have existed'. There is no doubt at least that his representations were enlightened.

After this he was sent by Lord Shelburne, we are told, 'across the Atlantic as the intended legislator of Canada.' This must have been in 1767 or 1768, for he gave up the Under-secretaryship in the former year, and Lord Shelburne's official connexion with the colonies ceased in the latter, and was not renewed until 1782, at which time Morgann was otherwise engaged. It is probable that he retired from his Government office in 1767 in order to undertake the Canadian mission, the nature and course of which can only be inferred. General Carleton, who was then acting as Governor-General, is known to have opposed a scheme put forward by Lord Shelburne about 1766 for providing Canada with a Council and Assembly. While this and other points of local administration remained unsettled,—it was even disputed under which laws the Canadians were living, French or British,—there was matter enough for an envoy of the Home Government

to examine on the spot. If it is implied in the words, 'the intended legislator of Canada,' that Morgann's powers went beyond examining and reporting, the exercise of them was doubtless conditional, and there is no reason to think that he actually did more than collect information and confer with Carleton. In 1769 Carleton crossed to London to answer questions and advocate his own ideas, and it is probable that Morgann — Lord Shelburne having already withdrawn from office—returned at least as soon. He and Carleton had become good friends, and during the next four years they must often have met in London, and considering Morgann's liberal views and his recent local studies we may assume with some reason that he was no stranger to the framing of the Quebec Act of 1774,—in which Carleton certainly had a large part,—and that he thus helped to obtain for French Canada the corner-stone of her political and religious liberty.

The next time we find Morgann with a special employment is in 1782, or a dozen years after his Canadian mission, and this long blank interval may serve to raise the question whether he had any regular profession or not. He has been described as a 'clerk in the Foreign Office', and it would agree well enough with most of his re-

corded doings to assume that he was normally a Government official. There are difficulties in the way, however. Apart from the fact that the Foreign Office did not come into existence till Morgann was nearly sixty, it does not appear from the extant lists of officials that Morgann belonged to any Government office during most of his life, if we except his more or less nominal connexion with the Mint. He may have given private help to Lord Shelburne and perhaps to other statesmen oftener than we know, but such occupation can only have been intermittent, and on the whole the conjecture that his ordinary position was that of a gentleman of leisure, with some small inherited income, who occasionally served the State, —though never as a member of Parliament,— seems permissible.

Anyway, we do not hear of him doing anything but literary work of an unlucrative kind between 1770 and 1782. In the latter year he crossed the Atlantic again, going to New York as official Secretary to Carleton, who had just been appointed Commander-in-chief. They sailed from England in March, and by the end of April Morgann was busy at head-quarters in Manhattan, where his sagacity and knowledge found an opening suited to them. Fighting

was less needed than statesmanship at this stage of the Revolutionary War; indeed, Carleton went out with the double title, 'Commander-in-chief and Commissioner for restoring peace.' A treaty was being spoken of; the prospect required the British in America to show as much conciliation as prudence and dignity permitted; moreover, the Government at home, in order to shape its proposals to the best advantage, needed an accurate running comment upon the changes in American feeling and other conditions as they occurred. The usefulness of Morgann in these circumstances proved to be such that, about the middle of his stay in New York, he was specially rewarded, at the King's request, with a life-pension of £250 a year and a considerable grant of ready money. He returned home in July, 1783, after an absence of fifteen months, to give Lord North, then Prime Minister, a verbal report and the benefit of his experience in the last stage of the negotiations. When the treaty of peace was signed, he was appointed Secretary of the Embassy charged with the ratification of it,—in acknowledgement, no doubt, of his share in the result,—and in 1784 he received a second official sinecure, worth £200 a year, as one of the four Commissioners of the Hackney Coach Office. At this point his active

career, so far as we know, came to an end, though he lived on for another eighteen years. He settled at Knightsbridge, where he owned a house, and it was there that he died.

Of Morgann's personality two good sketches have been preserved in out-of-the-way places—the one in a footnote to a 'Life of Milton' published two years after his death, the other in the preface to an obscure poem on 'The Pleasures of Conversation', which appeared in 1807. The 'Life of Milton' was by a literary clergyman, Dr. Charles Symmons, son of John Symmons, a Welsh squire, who represented Cardiganshire in Parliament from 1746 to 1761. Morgann was intimate with three generations of the Symmons family. As a young man he frequented the town house of John Symmons, and Charles (some thirty years his junior) speaks of him as one 'who has fondled my infancy in his arms, who was the friend of my youth, who expanded the liberality of my opening heart and first taught me to think and to judge'. Morgann, who seems to have been a lifelong bachelor, became as devoted to Charles's children as he had been to their father, and to one of them, John, we indirectly owe some information about his doings in America, for this young man handed

over to the safe keeping of the Royal Institution a collection of official papers which Morgann had brought back from New York and given to him. John was a barrister, and another barrister—a friend of his—called William Cooke, seems to have lived with Morgann in his latter years, possibly as his secretary. Cooke was the author of the poem on the 'Pleasures of Conversation'.

Morgann appears in these sketches as an urbane old gentleman, used to fashionable society and to intercourse with 'the great', 'highly placed', but simple and disinterested,—('small as his disinterestedness had suffered his fortune to remain',)—one who 'from a long intercourse with the world acquired no suspicion or hardness, but with the simplicity and candour retained to the last the cheerfulness and sensibility of childhood'. His rectitude, his benevolence, his hatred of cruelty and oppression are insisted upon, but he stands out most clearly perhaps as a spirited *causeur*, 'the charm of every society he mixed with,' displaying 'the happiest arts of badinage and pleasantry', who 'even when he was in error continued to be specious and to please, and never failed of your applause, though he might sometimes of your assent'. His 'creative fancy', it seems, 'branched upon such an infinite variety of views as made it sometimes

difficult for him to settle upon the close point, but when he gained that point (which he generally did) with what eloquence and perspicuity did he support it! With what energies did the heart speak! Nay, even when he missed it, he led us through such a delightful labyrinth of fragrance and flowers as induced us to forget the disappointment.'

'His leisure hours', Cooke tells us, 'were frequently employed upon some curious or interesting literary subject,' and Charles Symmons, mentioning the destruction of papers after his death, deplores particularly the loss of 'some in the walks of politics, metaphysics and criticism'. It is possible that some of his publications are still unidentified, since he wrote anonymously. Those identified are the Falstaff essay, and pamphlets on a national militia, the slave trade, the prevention of adultery, and the state of France in 1794. Boswell, who calls the Falstaff essay 'very ingenious', records two particular meetings between Morgann and Dr. Johnson. On the one occasion the pair had a dispute 'pretty late at night', and Johnson 'would not give up though he was in the wrong', but he acknowledged his error next morning at breakfast; on the other, Morgann broke down the doctor's pretended admiration of a poetaster by provoking him diplo-

matically to the celebrated admission, 'Sir, there is no settling the point of precedency between a louse and a flea.'

The *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* was written in 1774, laid aside for some time, and revised and published in 1777, when Morgann was fifty-one and, as he says, 'unengaged'. A second edition was soon called for, but, being withheld at his wish during his lifetime, did not appear till 1820. In 1825 a publisher saw reason to bring the essay out a third time; and the present is the fourth edition.

Morgann speaks of his work as 'a mere experiment . . . attended by all the difficulties and dangers of Novelty'. He might claim novelty for it upon two grounds. No previous study of a single character of Shakespeare's had been carried out on so elaborate a scale, and it seems that by the mere size of his example Morgann stimulated a branch of Shakespearian criticism that was soon to flourish greatly. Secondly,—and here he has had fewer imitators,—he regarded his subject from a new point of view.

Writers about Shakespeare's characters appear usually to be prompted by one or more of

the following motives: to inquire into human nature itself, the persons in the plays being taken simply as real persons, like those in history; to inquire into Shakespeare's conception and estimate of human nature; to discover how the dramatist adapts human nature to the forms of his art. Morgann contends—and this is his special point of view—that the third of these enterprises should come first,—that we must begin by ascertaining how far the character is modified by the dramatic medium in which it is presented, before we can hope to learn anything certain from it either about human nature or about Shakespeare's conception and estimate of human nature.

The title of the essay carefully indicates this contention when it sets forth the subject as, not simply 'the character', but 'the dramatic character' of Falstaff,—that is, an adjusted character, arranged and manipulated by the craftsman for a particular occasion, with some features deliberately blurred or diminished and others deliberately thrown forward; a character in an 'artificial condition'; in short, a 'theatric form',—these two expressions, 'artificial condition' and 'theatric form', being used by Morgann as synonymous with 'dramatic character'. He argues in effect: if we did not instinctively, before a picture of a group of people, allow for

some influences of the artist's general scheme, of the contrasting juxtaposition of figures, and so on, what strange assertions we might make about the colouring and anatomy of the originals; and what kind of information about human nature, or about Shakespeare's conception of it, are we likely to obtain from the 'theatric form' of Falstaff, if the peculiarities or refractions of his presentation in the play are not distinguished and discounted first?

Morgann analysed his subject from this point of view with all the qualities of a great critic, except one: the essay is poorly arranged. The truth is, it overflowed its plan in the course of writing. Setting out for a piece of scholarly diversion, for a critical *jeu d'esprit*,—the defence of Falstaff from the charge of cowardice,—Morgann was soon tempted into a more serious inquiry and went deeper in it than his original plan allowed. He was reluctant to go so far, it seems, or at least was fully aware of something amorphous in the consequences. He deplores his lapses from the intended airy strain, and says in his preface: 'If the book shall be fortunate enough to obtain another impression, a separation may be made, and such of the heavier parts as cannot be wholly dispensed with sink to their proper station—a Note.' When a second impression

was called for, he probably did not refuse the demand until he had convinced himself that he could not harmonize his work by removing the heavier parts to the margin without destroying it. The observant reader, however, who is prepared for some confusion, will probably find clues enough scattered about to save him from being often at a loss.

The essay is both a study of Falstaff and a study of Shakespeare, and the value of its point of view may be put to a double test. We may first compare it with other appreciations of the Knight which have a different point of view,—with Johnson's or Hazlitt's, for instance. These accounts are so much shorter than Morgann's that the sense of familiarity which comes from abundance of detail cannot be expected of them in the same measure; but the reader who turns from them to our essay may feel in it, apart from this, a deeper kind of intimacy which is due to its method. Morgann, he will perhaps feel, has a passport which enables him to go behind the scenes and to speak with the accent of certainty, where Johnson and Hazlitt, through their indifference to the 'artificial condition', are comparatively superficial and unconvincing. They seem to be fumbling at a lock with keys

which do not quite fit it. Morgann received some suggestions, no doubt, from Johnson's remarks on Falstaff, and the similarity of ideas, so far as it goes, makes the distinction of method all the plainer.

And then our author's guiding conception has enabled him to make a singularly penetrating exploration of the mind of the craftsman of the 'theatric form'. 'Falstaff is the word, but Shakespeare is the theme,' says Morgann, about his essay, and the reader will agree with him. He does not concern himself much with Shakespeare as a man, a poet, or a philosopher, but he flashes on us some glimpses so far-reaching into the *technique* and creative efforts of the dramatist that a reverent spectator might almost feel a little hesitation in taking advantage of them, as if he were trespassing on sacred mysteries.

NOTE

A few obvious misprints, in addition to those noticed in the *Errata* (p. 186) of the edition of 1777, have been corrected. But many harmless irregularities have been left unaltered in the reprint, which follows its original by page and line. And some doubtful readings have been given the benefit of the doubt.

AN

E S S A Y

ON

SHAKESPEARE's *FALSTAFF.*

A N

E S S A Y

ON THE

DRAMATIC CHARACTER

OF

Sir *JOHN FALSTAFF.*

I am not *John of Gaunt* your Grandfather, but yet *no* COWARD, *Hal.*

First Part of HENRY IV.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. DAVIES, IN RUSSEL-STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

MDCCLXXVII.

PREFACE.

THE following ſheets were written in conſequence of a friendly converſation, turning by ſome chance upon the Character of FALSTAFF, wherein the Writer, maintaining contrary to the general Opinion, that, this Character was not intended to be ſhewn as a Coward, he was challenged to deliver and ſupport that Opinion from the Preſs, with an engagement, now he fears forgotten, for it was three years ago, that he ſhould be anſwered thro' the

ſame channel: Thus ſtimulated, theſe papers were almoſt wholly written in a very ſhort time, but not without thoſe attentions, whether ſucceſsful or not, which ſeemed neceſſary to carry them beyond the Preſs into the hands of the Public. From the influence of the foregoing circumſtances it is, that the Writer has generally aſſumed rather the character and tone of an Advocate than of an Inquirer;—though if he had not firſt *inquired* and been *convinced*, he ſhould never have attempted to have

have amuſed either himſelf or others with the ſubject.—The impulſe of the occaſion, however, being paſſed, the papers were thrown by, and almoſt forgotten: But having been looked into of late by ſome friends, who obſerving that the Writer had not enlarged ſo far for the ſake of FALSTAFF alone, but that the Argument was made ſubſervient to Critical amuſement, perſuaded him to reviſe and convey it to the Preſs. This has been accordingly done, though he fears ſomething too haſtily, as he found it proper

to add, while the papers were in the courſe of printing, ſome conſiderations on the *Whole* Character of FALSTAFF; which ought to have been accompanied by a ſlight reform of a few preceding paſſages, which may ſeem, in conſequence of this addition, to contain too favourable a repreſentation of his Morals.

The vindication of FALSTAFF's Courage is truly no otherwiſe the object than ſome old fantaſtic Oak, or groteſque Rock, may be the object of a morning's ride; yet being

being propoſed as ſuch, may ſerve to limit the diſtance, and ſhape the courſe: The real object is Exerciſe, and the Delight which a rich, beautiful, pictureſque, and perhaps unknown Country, may excite from every ſide. Such an Exerciſe may admit of ſome little excurſion, keeping however the Road in view; but ſeems to exclude every appearance of labour and of toil.—Under the impreſſion of ſuch Feelings the Writer has endeavoured to preſerve to his Text a certain lightneſs of air, and chearfulneſs

fulneſs of tone; but is ſenſible however that the manner of diſcuſſion does not *every where*, particularly near the commencement, ſufficiently correſpond with his deſign.—If the Book ſhall be fortunate enough to obtain another Impreſſion, a ſeparation may be made; and ſuch of the heavier parts as cannot be wholly diſpenſed with, ſink to their more proper ſtation,—a Note.

He is fearful likewiſe that he may have erred in the other extreme; and that having thought himſelf

himſelf intitled, even in argument, to a certain degree of playful diſcuſſion, may have puſhed it, in a few places, even to levity. This error might be yet more eaſily reformed than the other.—The Book is perhaps, as it ſtands, too bulky for the ſubject; but if the Reader knew how many preſſing conſiderations, as it grew into ſize, the Author reſiſted, which yet ſeemed intitled to be heard, he would the more readily excuſe him.

The whole is a mere Experiment, and the Writer conſiders it as ſuch:

It

It may have the advantages, but it is likewiſe attended with all the difficulties and dangers, of *Novelty*.

ON THE

Dramatic Character

OF

Sir *JOHN FALSTAFF.*

THE ideas which I have formed concerning the Courage and Military Character of the Dramatic Sir *John Falſtaff*, are ſo different from thoſe which I find generally to prevail in the world, that I ſhall take the liberty of ſtating my ſentiments on the ſubject; in hope that ſome perſon as unengaged as myſelf, will either correct and reform my error in this reſpect; or, joining himſelf to my opinion, redeem me from, what I may call, the reproach of ſingularity.

I am to avow then, that I do not clearly diſcern that Sir *John Falſtaff* deſerves to bear the character ſo generally given him of an abſolute Coward; or, in other words, that I do not conceive *Shakeſpeare* ever meant to make Cowardice an eſſential part of his conſtitution.

I know how univerſally the contrary opinion prevails; and I know what reſpect and deference are due to the public voice. But if to the avowal of this ſingularity, I add all the reaſons that have led me to it, and acknowledge myſelf to be wholly in the judgment of the public, I ſhall hope to avoid the cenſure of too much forwardneſs or indecorum.

It muſt, in the firſt place, be admitted that the appearances in this caſe are ſingularly ſtrong and ſtriking; and ſo they had need be, to become the ground of ſo general a cenſure. We ſee this extraordinary Character, almoſt in the firſt moment of our acquaintance with him, involved in circumſtances

cumſtances of apparent diſhonour; and we hear him familiarly called *Coward* by his moſt intimate companions. We ſee him, on occaſion of the robbery at *Gads-Hill*, in the very act of running away from the Prince and *Poins*; and we behold him, on another of more honourable obligation, in open day light, in battle, and acting in his profeſſion as a Soldier, eſcaping from *Douglas* even out of the world as it were; counterfeiting death, and deſerting his very exiſtence; and we find him on the former occaſion, betrayed into thoſe *lies* and *braggadocioes*, which are the uſual concomitants of Cowardice in Military men, and pretenders to valour. Theſe are not only in themſelves ſtrong circumſtances, but they are moreover thruſt forward, preſt upon our notice as the ſubject of our mirth, as the great buſineſs of the ſcene: No wonder, therefore, that the word ſhould go forth that *Falſtaff* is exhibited as a character of Cowardice and diſhonour.

What there is to the contrary of this, it is my buſineſs to diſcover. Much, I think, will preſently

appear; but it lies ſo diſperſed, is ſo latent, and ſo purpoſely obſcured, that the reader muſt have ſome patience whilſt I collect it into one body, and make it the object of a ſteady and regular contemplation.

But what have we to do, may my readers exclaim, with principles *ſo latent, ſo obſcured?* In Dramatic compoſition the *Impreſſion* is the *Fact*; and the Writer, who, meaning to impreſs one thing, has impreſſed another, is unworthy of obſervation.

It is a very unpleaſant thing to have, in the firſt ſetting out, ſo many and ſo ſtrong prejudices to contend with. All that one can do in ſuch caſe, is, to pray the reader to have a little patience in the commencement; and to reſerve his cenſure, if it muſt paſs, for the concluſion. Under his gracious allowance, therefore, I preſume to declare it, as my opinion, that Cowardice *is not* the *Impreſſion*, which the *whole* character of *Falſtaff* is

is calculated to make on the minds of an unprejudiced audience; tho' there be, I confeſs, a great deal of ſomething in the *compoſition* likely enough to puzzle, and conſequently to miſlead the Underſtanding.—The reader will perceive that I diſtinguiſh between *mental Impreſſions*, and the *Underſtanding*.—I wiſh to avoid every thing that looks like ſubtlety and refinement; but this is a diſtinction, which we all comprehend.—There are none of us unconſcious of certain feelings or ſenſations of mind, which do not ſeem to have paſſed thro' the Underſtanding; the effects, I ſuppoſe, of ſome ſecret influences from without, acting upon a certain mental ſenſe, and producing feelings and paſſions in juſt correſpondence to the force and variety of thoſe influences on the one hand, and to the quickneſs of our ſenſibility on the other. Be the cauſe, however, what it may, the fact is undoubtedly ſo; which is all I am concerned in. And it is equally a fact, which every man's experience may avouch, that the Underſtanding and thoſe feelings are frequently

at variance. The latter often ariſe from the moſt minute circumſtances, and frequently from ſuch as the Underſtanding cannot eſtimate, or even recognize; whereas the Underſtanding delights in abſtraction, and in general propoſitions; which, however true conſidered as ſuch, are very ſeldom, I had like to have ſaid *never*, perfectly applicable to any particular caſe. And hence, among other cauſes, it is, that we often condemn or applaud characters and actions on the credit of ſome logical proceſs, while our hearts revolt, and would fain lead us to a very different concluſion.

The Underſtanding ſeems for the moſt part to take cognizance of *actions* only, and from theſe to infer *motives* and *character*; but the ſenſe we have been ſpeaking of proceeds in a contrary courſe; and determines of *actions* from certain *firſt principles of character*, which ſeem wholly out of the reach of the Underſtanding. We cannot indeed do otherwiſe than admit that there muſt be

be diſtinct principles of character in every diſtinct individual: The manifeſt variety even in the minds of infants will oblige us to this. But what *are* theſe firſt principles of character? Not the objects, I am perſuaded, of the Underſtanding; and yet we take as ſtrong Impreſſions of them as if we could compare and aſſort them in a ſyllogiſm. We often love or hate at firſt ſight; and indeed, in general, diſlike or approve by ſome ſecret reference to theſe *principles*; and we judge even of conduct, not from any idea of abſtract good or evil in the nature of actions, but by refering thoſe actions to a ſuppoſed original character in the man himſelf. I do not mean that we *talk* thus; we could not indeed, if we would, explain ourſelves in detail on this head; we can neither account for Impreſſions and paſſions, nor communicate them to others by *words*: Tones and looks will ſometimes convey the *paſſion* ſtrangely, but the *Impreſſion* is incommunicable. The ſame cauſes may produce it indeed at the ſame time in many, but it is the ſeparate poſſeſſion of

each, and not in its nature transferable : It is an imperfect ſort of inſtinct, and proportionably dumb.—We might indeed, if we choſe it, candidly confeſs to one another, that we are greatly ſwayed by theſe feelings, and are by no means ſo *rational* in all points as we could wiſh ; but this would be a betraying of the intereſts of that high faculty, the Underſtanding, which we ſo value ourſelves upon, and which we more peculiarly call our own. This, we think, muſt not be ; and ſo we huddle up the matter, concealing it as much as poſſible, both from ourſelves and others. In Books indeed, wherein character, motive, and action, are all alike ſubjected to the Underſtanding, it is generally a very clear caſe ; and we make deciſions compounded of them all: And thus we are willing to approve of *Candide*, tho' he kills my Lord the Inquiſitor, and runs thro' the body the Baron of *Thunder-ten-tronchk* the ſon of his patron, and the brother of his beloved *Cunégonde* : But in real life, I believe, *my Lords the Judges* would be apt to inform the

Gentlemen

Gentlemen of the Jury, that my *Lord the Inquiſitor* was *ill killed*; as *Candide* did not proceed on the urgency of the moment, but on the ſpeculation only of future evil. And indeed this clear perception, in Novels and Plays, of the union of character and action not ſeen in nature, is the principal defect of ſuch compoſitions, and what renders them but ill pictures of human life, and wretched guides of conduct.

But if there was *one man* in the world, who could make a more perfect draught of real nature, and ſteal ſuch Impreſſions on his audience, without their ſpecial notice, as ſhould keep their hold in ſpite of any error of their Underſtanding, and ſhould thereupon venture to introduce an apparent incongruity of character and action, for ends which I ſhall preſently endeavour to explain; ſuch an imitation would be worth our niceſt curioſity and attention. But in ſuch a caſe as this, the reader might expect that he ſhould find us all talking the language of the Underſtanding

ſtanding only; that is, cenſuring the action with very little conſcientious inveſtigation even of *that*; and transferring the cenſure, in every odious colour, to the actor himſelf; how much ſoever our hearts and affections might ſecretly revolt: For as to the *Impreſſion*, we have already obſerved that it has no tongue; nor is its operation and influence likely to be made the ſubject of conference and communication.

It is not to the *Courage* only of *Falſtaff* that we think theſe obſervations will apply: No part whatever of his character ſeems to be fully ſettled in our minds; at leaſt there is ſomething ſtrangely incongruous in our diſcourſe and affections concerning him. We all like *Old Jack*; yet, by ſome ſtrange perverſe fate, we all abuſe him, and deny him the poſſeſſion of any one ſingle good or reſpectable quality. There is ſomething extraordinary in this: It muſt be a ſtrange art in *Shakeſpeare* which can draw our liking and good will towards ſo offenſive an object. He has wit, it will be ſaid; chearfulneſs and humour of the moſt characteriſtic and captivating

ſort.

ſort. And is this enough? Is the humour and gaiety of vice ſo very captivating? Is the wit, characteriſtic of baſeneſs and every ill quality capable of attaching the heart and winning the affections? Or does not the apparency of ſuch humour, and the flaſhes of ſuch wit, by more ſtrongly diſcloſing the deformity of character, but the more effectually excite our hatred and contempt of the man? And yet this is not our *feeling* of *Falſtaff*'s character. When he has ceaſed to amuſe us, we find no emotions of diſguſt; we can ſcarcely forgive the ingratitude of the Prince in the new-born virtue of the King, and we curſe the ſeverity of that poetic juſtice which conſigns our old good-natured delightful companion to the cuſtody of the *warden*, and the diſhonours of the *Fleet*.

I am willing, however, to admit that if a Dramatic writer will but preſerve to any character the qualities of a ſtrong mind, particularly Courage and ability, that it will be afterwards no very difficult taſk (as I may have occaſion to explain)

plain) to diſcharge that *diſguſt* which ariſes from vicious manners ; and even to attach us (if ſuch character ſhould contain any quality productive of chearfulneſs and laughter) to the cauſe and ſubject of our mirth with ſome degree of affection.

But the queſtion which I am to conſider is of a very different nature : It is a queſtion of fact, and concerning a quality which forms the baſis of every reſpectable character ; a quality which is the very eſſence of a Military man ; and which is held up to us, in almoſt every Comic incident of the Play, as the ſubject of our obſervation. It is ſtrange then that it ſhould now be a queſtion, whether *Falſtaff* is, or is not a man of Courage; and whether we do in fact contemn him for the want, or reſpect him for the poſſeſſion of that quality : And yet I believe the reader will find that he has by no means decided this queſtion, even for himſelf.—If then it ſhould turn out, that this difficulty has ariſen out of the Art of

Shakeſpeare

Shakeſpeare, who has contrived to make ſecret Impreſſions upon us of Courage, and to preſerve thoſe Impreſſions in favour of a character which was to be held up for ſport and laughter on account of actions of apparent Cowardice and diſhonour, we ſhall have leſs occaſion to wonder, as *Shakeſpeare* is a Name which contains All of Dramatic artifice and genius.

If in this place the reader ſhall peeviſhly and prematurely object that the obſervations and diſtinctions I have laboured to eſtabliſh, are wholly unapplicable; he being himſelf unconſcious of ever having received any ſuch Impreſſion; what can be done in ſo nice a caſe, but to refer him to the following pages; by the number of which he may judge how very much I reſpect his objection, and by the variety of thoſe proofs, which I ſhall employ to induce him to part with it; and to recognize in its ſtead certain feelings, concealed and covered over perhaps, but not erazed, by time, reaſoning, and authority.

In

In the mean while, it may not perhaps be eaſy for him to reſolve how it comes about, that, whilſt we look upon *Falſtaff* as a character of the like nature with that of *Parolles* or of *Bobadil*, we ſhould preſerve for him a great degree of reſpect and good-will, and yet feel the higheſt diſdain and contempt of the others, tho' they are all involved in ſimilar ſituations. The reader, I believe, would wonder extremely to find either *Parolles* or *Bobadil* poſſeſs himſelf in danger: What then can be the cauſe that we are not at all ſurprized at the gaiety and eaſe of *Falſtaff* under the moſt trying circumſtances; and that we never think of charging *Shakeſpeare* with departing, on this account, from the truth and coherence of character? Perhaps, after all, the *real* character of *Falſtaff* may be different from his *apparent* one; and poſſibly this difference between reality and appearance, whilſt it accounts at once for our liking and our cenſure, may be the true point of humour in the character, and the ſource of all our laughter and delight. We

may

may chance to find, if we will but examine a little into the nature of thoſe circumſtances which have accidentally involved him, that he was intended to be drawn as a character of much Natural courage and reſolution; and be obliged thereupon to repeal thoſe deciſions, which may have been made upon the credit of ſome general tho' unapplicable propoſitions; the common ſource of error in other and higher matters. A little reflection may perhaps bring us round again to the point of our departure, and unite our Underſtandings to our inſtinct.—Let us then for a moment *ſuſpend* at leaſt our deciſions, and candidly and coolly inquire if Sir *John Falſtaff* be, indeed, what he has ſo often been called by critic and commentator, male and female,—a *Conſtitutional Coward.*

It will ſcarcely be poſſible to conſider the Courage of *Falſtaff* as wholly detached from his other qualities: But I write not profeſſedly of any part of his character, but what is included under the

term

term, *Courage*; however I may incidentally throw ſome lights on the whole.—The reader will not need to be told that this Inquiry will reſolve itſelf of courſe into a Critique on the genius, the arts, and the conduct of *Shakeſpeare*: For what is *Falſtaff*, what *Lear*, what *Hamlet*, or *Othello*, but different modifications of *Shakeſpeare*'s thought? It is true that this Inquiry is narrowed almoſt to a ſingle point: But general criticiſm is as uninſtructive as it is eaſy: *Shakeſpeare* deſerves to be conſidered in detail;—a taſk hitherto unattempted.

It may be proper, in the firſt place, to take a ſhort view of all the parts of *Falſtaff*'s Character, and then proceed to diſcover, if we can, what *Impreſſions*, as to Courage or Cowardice, he had made on the perſons of the Drama: After which we will examine, in courſe, ſuch evidence, either of *perſons* or *facts*, as are relative to the matter; and account as we may for thoſe appearances, which ſeem to have led to the opinion of his Conſtitutional Cowardice. The

The ſcene of the robbery, and the diſgraces attending it, which ſtand firſt in the Play, and introduce us to the knowledge of *Falſtaff*, I ſhall beg leave (as I think this ſcene to have been the ſource of much unreaſonable prejudice) to *reſerve* till we are more fully acquainted with the whole character of *Falſtaff*; and I ſhall therefore hope that the reader will not for a time advert to it, or to the jeſts of the *Prince* or of *Poins* in conſequence of that unlucky adventure.

In drawing out the parts of *Falſtaff*'s character, with which I ſhall begin this Inquiry, I ſhall take the liberty of putting Conſtitutional bravery into his compoſition; but the reader will be pleaſed to conſider what I ſhall ſay in that reſpect as ſpoken hypothetically for the preſent, to be retained, or diſcharged out of it, as he ſhall finally determine.

To me then it appears that the leading quality in *Falſtaff*'s character, and that from which all the reſt take their colour, is a high degree of wit

and humour, accompanied with great natural vigour and alacrity of mind. This quality ſo accompanied, led him probably very early into life, and made him highly acceptable to ſociety; ſo acceptable, as to make it ſeem unneceſſary for him to acquire any other virtue. Hence, perhaps, his continued debaucheries and diſſipations of every kind.—He ſeems, by nature, to have had a mind free of malice or any evil principle; but he never took the trouble of acquiring any good one. He found himſelf eſteemed and beloved with all his faults; nay *for* his faults, which were all connected with humour, and for the moſt part, grew out of it. As he had, poſſibly, no vices but ſuch as he thought might be openly profeſſed, ſo he appeared more diſſolute thro' oſtentation. To the character of wit and humour, to which all his other qualities ſeem to have conformed themſelves, he appears to have added a very neceſſary ſupport, *that* of the profeſſion of a *Soldier*. He had from nature, as I preſume to ſay, a ſpirit of boldneſs and enterpriſe; which in a Military age,

age, tho' employment was only occaſional, kept him always above contempt, ſecured him an honourable reception among the Great, and ſuited beſt both with his particular mode of humour and of vice. Thus living continually in ſociety, nay even in Taverns, and indulging himſelf, and being indulged by others, in every debauchery; drinking, whoring, gluttony, and eaſe; aſſuming a liberty of fiction, neceſſary perhaps to his wit, and often falling into falſity and lies, he ſeems to have ſet, by degrees, all ſober reputation at defiance; and finding eternal reſources in his wit, he borrows, ſhifts, defrauds, and even robs, without diſhonour.—Laughter and approbation attend his greateſt exceſſes; and being governed viſibly by no ſettled bad principle or ill deſign, fun and humour account for and cover all. By degrees, however, and thro' indulgence, he acquires bad habits, becomes an humouriſt, grows enormouſly corpulent, and falls into the infirmities of age; yet never quits, all the time, one ſingle levity or vice of youth, or loſes any of that chearfulneſs of

mind, which had enabled him to paſs thro' this courſe with eaſe to himſelf and delight to others; and thus, at laſt, mixing youth and age, enterprize and corpulency, wit and folly, poverty and expence, title and buffoonery, innocence as to purpoſe, and wickedneſs as to practice; neither incurring hatred by bad principle, or contempt by Cowardice, yet involved in circumſtances productive of imputation in both; a butt and a wit, a humouriſt and a man of humour, a touchſtone and a laughing ſtock, a jeſter and a jeſt, has Sir *John Falſtaff*, taken at that period of his life in which we ſee him, become the moſt perfect Comic character that perhaps ever was exhibited.

It may not poſſibly be wholly amiſs to remark in this place, that if Sir *John Falſtaff* had poſſeſſed any of that Cardinal quality, Prudence, alike the guardian of virtue and the protector of vice; that quality, from the poſſeſſion or the abſence of which, the character and fate of men in this life take, I think, their colour, and not from real vice or virtue; if he had conſidered his wit not as *principal* but *acceſſary* only; as the inſtrument of power,

power, and not as power itſelf; if he had had much baſeneſs to hide, if he had had leſs of what may be called mellowneſs or good humour, or leſs of health and ſpirit; if he had ſpurred and rode the world with his wit, inſtead of ſuffering the world, boys and all, to ride him;—he might, without any other eſſential change, have been the admiration and not the jeſt of mankind:—Or if he had lived in our day, and inſtead of attaching himſelf to one Prince, had renounced *all* friendſhip and *all* attachment, and had let himſelf out as the ready inſtrument and Zany of every ſucceſſive Miniſter, he might poſſibly have acquired the high honour of marking his ſhroud or decorating his coffin with the living rays of an Iriſh at leaſt, if not a Britiſh Coronet: Inſtead of which, tho' enforcing laughter from every diſpoſition, he appears, now, as ſuch a character, which every wiſe man will pity and avoid, every knave will cenſure, and every fool will fear: And accordingly *Shakeſpeare*, ever true to nature, has made *Harry* deſert, and *Lancaſter* cenſure him: —He dies where he lived, in a Tavern, broken-

hearted, without a friend; and his final exit is given up to the deriſion of fools. Nor has his misfortunes ended here; the ſcandal ariſing from the miſapplication of his wit and talents ſeems immortal. He has met with as little juſtice or mercy from his final judges the critics, as from his companions of the Drama. With our cheeks ſtill red with laughter, we ungratefully as unjuſtly cenſure him as a coward by nature, and a raſcal upon principle: Tho', if this were ſo, it might be hoped, for our own credit, that we ſhould behold him rather with diſguſt and diſapprobation than with pleaſure and delight.

But to remember our queſtion—*Is Falſtaff a conſtitutional coward?*

With reſpect to every infirmity, except that of Cowardice, we muſt take him as at the period in which he is repreſented to us. If we ſee him diſſipated, fat,—it is enough;—we have nothing to do with his youth, when he might perhaps have

have been modeſt, chaſte, "*and not an Eagle's talon in the waiſt.*" But *Conſtitutional Courage* extends to a man's whole life, makes a part of his nature, and is not to be taken up or deſerted like a mere Moral quality. It is true, there is a Courage founded upon *principle*, or rather a principle independent of Courage, which will ſometimes operate in ſpite of nature; a principle, which prefers death to ſhame, but which always refers itſelf, in conformity to its own nature, to the prevailing modes of honour, and the faſhions of the age.—But Natural courage is another thing: It is independent of opinion; It adapts itſelf to occaſions, preſerves itſelf under every ſhape, and can avail itſelf of flight as well as of action.—In the laſt war, ſome Indians of America perceiving a line of Highlanders to keep their ſtation under every diſadvantage, and under a fire which they could not effectually return, were ſo miſerably miſtaken in our points of honour as to conjecture, from obſervation on the habit and

ſtability of thoſe troops, that they were indeed the women of England, who wanted courage to run away.—That Courage which is founded in nature and conſtitution, *Falſtaff*, as I preſume to ſay, poſſeſſed;—but I am ready to allow, that the principle already mentioned, ſo far as it refers to reputation only, began with every other Moral quality to loſe its hold on him in his old age; that is, at the time of life in which he is repreſented to us; a period, as it ſhould ſeem, approaching to *ſeventy*.—The truth is that he had drollery enough to ſupport himſelf in credit without the point of honour, and had addreſs enough to make even the preſervation of his life a point of drollery. The reader knows I allude, tho' ſomething prematurely, to his fictitious death in the battle of Shrewſbury. This incident is generally conſtrued to the diſadvantage of *Falſtaff:* It is a tranſaction which bears the external marks of Cowardice: It is alſo aggravated to the ſpectators by the idle tricks of the Player, who practiſes

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on this occaſion all the attitudes and wild apprehenſions of fear; more ambitious, as it ſhould ſeem, of repreſenting a Caliban than a *Falſtaff*; or indeed rather a poor unweildy miſerable Tortoiſe than either.—The painful Comedian lies ſpread out on his belly, and not only covers himſelf all over with his robe as with a ſhell, but forms a kind of round Tortoiſe-back by I know not what ſtuffing or contrivance; in addition to which, he alternately lifts up, and depreſſes, and dodges his head, and looks to the one ſide and to the other, ſo much with the piteous aſpect of that animal, that one would not be ſorry to ſee the ambitious imitator calipaſhed in his robe, and ſerved up for the entertainment of the gallery.—There is no hint for this mummery in the Play: Whatever there may be of diſhonour in *Falſtaff*'s conduct, he neither does or ſays any thing on this occaſion which indicates terror or diſorder of mind: On the contrary, this very act is a proof of his having all his wits about him, and is a ſtratagem, ſuch as it is, not improper for a buffoon

buffoon, whoſe fate would be ſingularly hard, if he ſhould not be allowed to avail himſelf of his Character when it might ſerve him in moſt ſtead. We muſt remember, in extenuation, that the executive, the deſtroying hand of *Douglas* was over him: "*It was time to counterfeit, or that "hot termagant Scot had paid him ſcot and lot too.*" He had but one choice; he was obliged to paſs thro' the ceremony of dying either in jeſt or in earneſt; and we ſhall not be ſurprized at the event, when we remember his propenſities to the former.—Life (and eſpecially the life of *Falſtaff*) might be a jeſt; but he could ſee no joke whatever in dying: To be chopfallen was, with him, to loſe both life and character together: He ſaw the point of honour, as well as every thing elſe, in ridiculous lights, and began to renounce its tyranny.

But I am too much in advance, and muſt retreat for more advantage. I ſhould not forget how much opinion is againſt me, and that I am to make my way by the mere force and weight

weight of evidence; without which I muſt not hope to poſſeſs myſelf of the reader: No addreſs, no inſinuation will avail. To this evidence, then, I now reſort. The Courage of *Falſtaff* is my Theme: And no paſſage will I ſpare from which any thing can be inferred as relative to this point. It would be as vain as injudicious to attempt concealment: How could I eſcape detection? The Play is in every one's memory, and a ſingle paſſage remembered in detection would tell, in the mind of the partial obſerver, for fifty times its real weight. Indeed this argument would be void of all excuſe if it declined any difficulty; if it did not meet, if it did not challenge oppoſition. Every paſſage then ſhall be produced from which, in my opinion, any inference, favourable or unfavourable, has or can be drawn;—but not methodically, not formally, as texts for comment, but as chance or convenience ſhall lead the way; but in what ſhape ſoever, they ſhall be always diſtinguiſhingly marked for notice. And ſo with

with that attention to truth and candour which ought to accompany even our lighteſt amuſements I proceed to offer ſuch proof as the caſe will admit, that *Courage* is a part of *Falſtaff*'s *Character*, that it belonged to his conſtitution, and was manifeſt in the conduct and practice of his whole life.

Let us then examine, as a ſource of very authentic information, what Impreſſions *Sir John Falſtaff* had made on the characters of the Drama; and in what eſtimation he is ſuppoſed to ſtand with mankind in general as to the point of Perſonal Courage. But the quotations we make for this or other purpoſes, muſt, it is confeſſed, be lightly touched, and no particular paſſage ſtrongly relied on, either in his favour or againſt him. Every thing which he himſelf ſays, or is ſaid of him, is ſo phantaſtically diſcoloured by humour, or folly, or jeſt, that we muſt for the moſt part look to the ſpirit rather than the letter of what

is

is uttered, and rely at laſt only on a combination of the whole.

We will begin then, if the reader pleaſes, by inquiring what Impreſſion the very Vulgar had taken of *Falſtaff*. If it is not that of Cowardice, be it what elſe it may, that of a man of violence, or *a Ruffian in years*, as Harry calls him, or any thing elſe, it anſwers my purpoſe; how inſignificant ſoever the characters or incidents to be firſt produced may otherwiſe appear;—for theſe Impreſſions muſt have been taken either from perſonal knowledge and obſervation; or, what will do better for my purpoſe, from common fame. Altho' I muſt admit ſome part of this evidence will appear ſo weak and trifling that it certainly ought not to be produced but in proof Impreſſion only.

The *Hoſteſs Quickly* employs two officers to arreſt *Falſtaff*: On the mention of his name, one of them immediately obſerves, "*that it may chance to coſt ſome*

"*of*

"*of them their lives, for that he will ſtab.—Alas a day,*" ſays the hoſteſs, "*take heed of him, he cares not* "*what miſchief he doth; if his weapon be out he will* "*foin like any devil; He will ſpare neither man,* "*woman, or child.*" Accordingly, we find that when they lay hold on him he reſiſts to the utmoſt of his power, and calls upon *Bardolph*, whoſe arms are at liberty, to draw. "*Away, varlets, draw* "*Bardolph, cut me off the villain's head, throw the* "*quean in the kennel.*" The officers cry, *a reſcue, a reſcue!* But the Chief Juſtice comes in and the ſcuffle ceaſes. In another ſcene, his wench *Doll Tearſheet* aſks him "*when he will leave fighting* * * * * * * *and patch up his old body for heaven.*" This is occaſioned by his drawing his rapier, on great provocation, and driving *Piſtol*, who is drawn likewiſe, down ſtairs, and hurting him in the ſhoulder. To drive *Piſtol* was no great feat; nor do I mention it as ſuch; but upon this occaſion it was neceſſary. "*A Raſcal bragging ſlave*, ſays he, "*the rogue fled from me like quickſilver.*" Expreſſions, which as they remember the cowardice

ardice of *Piſtol*, ſeem to prove that *Falſtaff* did not value himſelf on the adventure. Even ſomething may be drawn from *Davy*, *Shallow's* ſerving man, who calls *Falſtaff*, in ignorant admiration, the *man of war*. I muſt obſerve here, and I beg the reader will notice it, that there is not a ſingle expreſſion dropt by theſe people, or either of *Falſtaff's* followers, from which may be inferred the leaſt ſuſpicion of Cowardice in his character; and this is I think ſuch an *implied negation* as deſerves conſiderable weight.

But to go a little higher, if, indeed, to conſider *Shallow's* opinion be to go *higher*: It is from him, however, that we get the earlieſt account of Falſtaff. He *remembers him a Page to Thomas Mowbray Duke of Norfolk*: "*He broke*, ſays he, "*Schoggan's head at the Court-Gate when he was* "*but a crack thus high*." *Shallow*, throughout, conſiders him as a great Leader and Soldier, and relates this fact as an early indication only of his future Proweſs. *Shallow* it is true, is a very ridiculous

culous character; but he picked up theſe Impreſſions ſomewhere; and he picked up none of a contrary tendency.—I want at preſent only to prove that *Falſtaff* ſtood well in the report of common fame as to this point; and he was now near ſeventy years of age, and had paſſed in a Military line thro' the active part of his life. At this period common fame may be well conſidered as the *ſeal* of his character; a ſeal which ought not perhaps to be broke open on the evidence of any future tranſaction.

But to proceed. *Lord Bardolph* was a man of the world, and of ſenſe and obſervation. He informs *Northumberland*, erroneouſly indeed, that *Percy* had beaten the King at Shrewſbury. "*The King*," according to him, "*was wounded*; *the* "*Prince of Wales and the two Blunts ſlain*, *certain* "*Nobles*, whom he names, *had eſcaped by flight*, *and* "*the Brawn Sir John Falſtaff was taken priſoner.*" But how came *Falſtaff* into this liſt? Common fame had put him there. He is ſingularly obliged

ged to Common fame.—But if he had not been a Soldier of repute, if he had not been brave as well as fat, if he had been *mere brawn*, it would have been more germane to the matter if this lord had put him down among the baggage or the provender. The fact ſeems to be, that there is a real conſequence about Sir *John Falſtaff* which is not brought forward: We ſee him only in his familiar hours; we enter the tavern with *Hal* and *Poins*; we join in the laugh and *take a pride to gird at him:* But there may be a great deal of truth in what he himſelf writes to the Prince, that tho' he be "*Jack Falſtaff with his Familiars*, *he is* Sir John *with the reſt of Europe*." It has been remarked, and very truly I believe, that no man is a hero in the eye of his valet-de-chambre; and *thus* it is, we are witneſſes only of *Falſtaff*'s weakneſs and buffoonery; our acquaintance is with *Jack Falſtaff*, *Plump Jack*, and *Sir John Paunch*; but if we would look for *Sir John Falſtaff*, we muſt put on, as *Bunyan* would have expreſſed it, the ſpectacles of obſervation. With reſpect, for inſtance,

to his Military command at Shrewſbury, nothing appears on the ſurface but the Prince's familiarly ſaying, in the tone uſually aſſumed when ſpeaking of *Falſtaff*, "*I will procure this fat rogue a Charge* "*of foot*;" and in another place, "*I will procure* "*thee Jack a Charge of foot*; *meet me to-morrow in the* "*Temple Hall.*" Indeed we might venture to infer from this, that a Prince of ſo great ability, whoſe wildneſs was only external and aſſumed, would not have procured, in ſo nice and critical a conjuncture, a Charge of foot for a known Coward. But there was more it ſeems in the caſe: We now find from this report, to which *Lord Bardolph* had given full credit, that the world had its eye upon *Falſtaff* as an officer of merit, whom it expected to find in the field, and whoſe fate in the battle was an object of Public concern: His life was, it ſeems, very material indeed; a thread of ſo much dependence, that *fiction*, weaving the fates of Princes, did not think it unworthy, how coarſe ſoever, of being made a part of the tiſſue.

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We ſhall next produce the evidence of the Chief Juſtice of England. He inquires of his attendant, "*if the man who was then paſſing him was* "Falſtaff; *he who was in queſtion for the robbery.*" The attendant anſwers affirmatively, but reminds his lord "*that he had ſince done good ſervice at Shrewſbury*;" and the Chief Juſtice, on this occaſion, rating him for his debaucheries, tells him "*that his day's ſervice at Shrewſbury had gilded over* "*his night's exploit at Gads Hill.*" This is ſurely more than Common fame: *The Chief Juſtice* muſt have known his whole character taken together, and muſt have received the moſt authentic information, and in the trueſt colours, of his behaviour in that action.

But, perhaps, after all, the Military men may be eſteemed the beſt judges in points of this nature. Let us hear then *Coleville* of the dale, *a Soldier, in degree a Knight, a famous rebel, and* "*whoſe* "*betters, had they been ruled by him, would have ſold* "*themſelves dearer.*" A man who is of conſequence

enough to be guarded by *Blunt* and *led to preſent execution*. This man yields himſelf up even to the very Name and Reputation of *Falſtaff*. "*I think*," ſays he, "*you are Sir John Falſtaff, and in that thought* "*yield me*." But this is but one only among the men of the ſword; they ſhall be produced then by *dozens*, if that will ſatisfy. Upon the return of the King and Prince Henry from Wales, the Prince ſeeks out and finds *Falſtaff* debauching in a tavern; where *Peto* preſently brings an account of ill news from the North; and adds, "*that as he came along he met or overtook a dozen Captains, bare headed, ſweating, knocking at the taverns, and aſking every one for* Sir John Falſtaff. He is followed by *Bardolph*, who informs *Falſtaff* that "*He muſt away* "*to the Court immediately*; *a dozen Captains ſtay at* "*door for him*." Here is Military evidence in abundance, and *Court evidence* too; for what are we to infer from *Falſtaff*'s being ſent for to Court on this ill news, but that his opinion was to be aſked, as a Military man of ſkill and experience, concerning the defences neceſſary to be taken. Nor is

Shakeſpeare

Shakespeare content, here, with leaving us to gather up *Falstaff*'s *better character* from inference and deduction: He comments on the fact by making *Falstaff* observe that "*Men of merit are sought after*: "*The undeserver may sleep when the man of action is* "*called on.*" I do not wish to draw *Falstaff*'s character out of his own mouth; but this observation refers to the fact, and is founded in reason. Nor ought we to reject, what in another place he says to the Chief Justice, as it is in the nature of an appeal to his knowledge. "*There is not a dan-* "*gerous action,*" says he, "*can peep out his head but I am thrust upon it.*" The Chief Justice seems by his answer to admit the fact. "*Well, be honest, be honest, and heaven bless your expedition.*" But the whole passage may deserve transcribing.

Ch. Just. "*Well, the King has severed you and Prince Henry. I hear you are going with Lord John of Lancaster, against the Archbishop and the Earl of Northumberland.*"

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" Falſ. *Yes, I thank your pretty ſweet wit for it; but* " *look you pray, all you that kiſs my lady peace at home,* " *that our armies join not in a hot day; for I take but* " *two ſhirts out with me, and I mean not to ſweat ex-* " *traordinarily: If it be a hot day, if I brandiſh any* " *thing but a bottle, would I might never ſpit white* " *again. There is not a dangerous action can peep* " *out his head but I am thruſt upon it. Well I cannot* " *laſt for ever.—But it was always the trick of our* " *Engliſh nation, if they have a good thing to make it* " *too common. If you will needs ſay I am an old man* " *you ſhould give me reſt: I would to God my name* " *were not ſo terrible to the enemy as it is. I were* " *better to be eaten to death with a ruſt than to be ſcour'd* " *to nothing with perpetual motion.*"

" Ch. Juſt. *Well be honeſt, be honeſt, and heaven* " *bleſs your expedition.*"

Falſtaff indulges himſelf here in humourous exaggeration;—theſe paſſages are not meant to be taken, nor are we to ſuppoſe that they were taken

taken, literally;—but if there was not a ground of truth, if *Falſtaff* had not had ſuch a degree of Military reputation as was capable of being thus humourouſly amplified and exaggerated, the whole dialogue would have been highly prepoſterous and abſurd, and the acquieſcing anſwer of the *Lord Chief Juſtice* ſingularly improper.—But upon the ſuppoſition of *Falſtaff*'s being conſidered, upon the whole, as a good and gallant Officer, the anſwer is juſt, and correſponds with the acknowledgment which had a little before been made, "*that his day's ſervice at Shrewſbury had gilded* "*over his night's exploit at Gads Hill.—You may* "*thank the unquiet time*, ſays the Chief Juſtice, "*for your quiet o'erpoſting of that action*;" agreeing with what *Falſtaff* ſays in another place;—"*Well* "*God be thanked for theſe Rebels, they offend none but* "*the virtuous; I laud them, I praiſe them.*"—Whether this be ſaid in the true ſpirit of a Soldier or not, I do not determine; it is ſurely not in that of a mere Coward and Poltroon.

It will be needleſs to ſhew, which might be done from a variety of particulars, that *Falſtaff* was known, and had conſideration at Court. *Shallow* cultivates him in the idea that *a friend at Court is better than a penny in purſe*: *Weſtmorland* ſpeaks to him in the tone of an equal: Upon *Falſtaff*'s telling him, that he thought his lordſhip had been already at Shrewſbury, *Weſtmorland* replies,—*Faith Sir John, 'tis more than time "that I were there, and you too; the King I can tell "you looks for us all; we muſt away all to night.*— "*Tut*, ſays Falſtaff, *never fear me, I am as vigilant "as a cat to ſteal cream.*"—He deſires, in another place, of my lord John of Lancaſter, "*that when he goes to Court, he may ſtand in his good report.*" His intercourſe and correſpondence with both theſe lords ſeem eaſy and familiar. *Go*, ſays he to the page, "*bear this to my Lord of Lancaſter, this "to the Prince, this to the Earl of Weſtmorland, and "this* (for he extended himſelf on all ſides) *to old Mrs. Urſula*," whom it ſeems, the rogue ought to have married many years before.—But theſe intimations

intimations are needleſs: We ſee him ourſelves in the *Royal Preſence*; where, certainly, his buffooneries never brought him; nor was the Prince of a character to commit ſo high an indecorum, as to thruſt, upon a ſolemn occaſion, a mere Tavern companion into his father's Preſence, eſpecially in a moment when he himſelf deſerts his looſer character, and takes up that of *a Prince indeed*. —In a very important ſcene, where *Worceſter* is expected with propoſals from *Percy*, and wherein he is received, is treated with, and carries back offers of accomodation from the King, the King's attendants upon the occaſion are *the Prince of Wales*, *Lord John of Lancaſter*, *the Earl of Weſtmorland*, *Sir Walter Blunt*, *and Sir John Falſtaff*.—What ſhall be ſaid to this? Falſtaff is not ſurely introduced here in vicious indulgence to a mob audience;—he utters but one word, a buffoon one indeed, but aſide and to the Prince only. Nothing, it ſhould ſeem, is wanting, if decorum would here have permitted, but that he ſhould have ſpoken one ſober ſentence in the

Preſence

Preſence (which yet we are to ſuppoſe him ready and able to do if occaſion ſhould have required; or his wit was given him to little purpoſe) and Sir *John Falſtaff* might be allowed to paſs for an eſtabliſhed Courtier and counſellor of ſtate. "*If* "*I do grow great*, ſays he, *I'll grow leſs*, *purge and* "*leave ſack*, *and live as a nobleman ſhould do*." Nobility did not then appear to him at an unmeaſurable diſtance; it was, it ſeems, in his idea, the very next link in the chain.

But to return. I would now demand what could bring *Falſtaff* into the Royal Preſence upon ſuch an occaſion, or juſtify the Prince's ſo public acknowledgment of him, but an eſtabliſhed fame and reputation of Military merit? In ſhort, juſt the like merit as brought Sir *Walter Blunt* into the ſame circumſtances of honour.

But it may be objected that his introduction into this ſcene is a piece of indecorum in the author. But upon what ground are we to ſuppoſe

poſe this? Upon the ground of his being a notorious Coward? Why this is the very point in queſtion, and cannot be granted: Even the direct contrary I have affirmed, and am endeavouring to ſupport. But if it be ſuppoſed upon any other ground, it does not concern me; I have nothing to do with *Shakeſpeare*'s indecorums in general. That there are indecorums in the Play I have no doubt: The indecent treatment of *Percy*'s dead body is the greateſt;—the familiarity of the inſignificant, rude, and even ill diſpoſed *Poins* with the Prince, is another;—but the admiſſion of *Falſtaff* into the Royal Preſence (ſuppoſing, which I have a right to ſuppoſe, that his Military character was unimpeached) does not ſeem to be in any reſpect among the number. In camps there is but one virtue and one vice; Military merit ſwallows up or covers all. But, after all, what have we to do with indecorums? Indecorums reſpect the propriety or impropriety of exhibiting certain actions;—not their *truth* or *falſhood* when exhibited. *Shakeſpeare* ſtands to us in the place

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of *truth* and *nature*: If we deſert this principle we cut the turf from under us; I may then object to the robbery and other paſſages as indecorums, and as contrary to the truth of character. In ſhort we may rend and tear the Play to pieces, and every man carry off what ſentences he likes beſt.—But why this inveterate malice againſt poor *Falſtaff?* He has faults enough in conſcience without loading him with the infamy of Cowardice; a charge, which, if true, would, if I am not greatly miſtaken, ſpoil all our mirth.—But of that hereafter.

It ſeems to me that, in our haſty judgment of ſome particular tranſactions, we forget the circumſtances and condition of his whole life and character, which yet deſerve our very particular attention. The author, it is true, has thrown the moſt advantageous of theſe circumſtances into the *back ground* as it were, and has brought nothing *out of the canvaſs* but his follies and buffoonery. We diſcover however, that in a very early period

of

of his life he was familiar with *John* of *Gaunt*; which could hardly be, unleſs he had poſſeſſed much perſonal gallantry and accompliſhment, and had derived his birth from a diſtinguiſhed at leaſt, if not from a Noble family.

It may ſeem very extravagant to inſiſt upon *Falſtaff*'s birth as a ground from which, by any inference, Perſonal courage may be derived, eſpecially after having acknowledged that he ſeemed to have deſerted thoſe points of honour, which are more peculiarly the accompanyments of rank. But it may be obſerved that in the Feudal ages rank and wealth were not only connected with the point of honour, but with perſonal ſtrength and natural courage. It is obſervable that Courage is a quality, which is at leaſt as tranſmiſſible to one's poſterity as features and complexion. In theſe periods men acquired and maintained their rank and poſſeſſions by perſonal proweſs and gallantry; and their marriage alliances were made, of courſe, in families of the

ſame

ſame character : And from hence, and from the exerciſes of their youth, we muſt account for the diſtinguiſhed force and bravery of our antient Barons. It is not therefore beſide my purpoſe to inquire what hints of the origin and birth of *Falſtaff*, *Shakeſpeare* may have dropped in different parts of the Play ; for tho' we may be diſpoſed to allow that *Falſtaff* in his old age might, under particular influences, deſert the point of honour, we cannot give up that unalienable poſſeſſion of Courage, which might have been derived to him from a noble or diſtinguiſhed ſtock.

But it may be ſaid that *Falſtaff* was in truth the child of invention only, and that a reference to the Feudal accidents of birth ſerves only to confound fiction with reality : Not altogether ſo. If the ideas of Courage and *birth* were ſtrongly aſſociated in the days of *Shakeſpeare*, then would the aſſignment of high birth to *Falſtaff* carry, and be intended to carry along with it, to the minds of the audience the aſſociated idea of Courage,

if

if nothing ſhould be ſpecially interpoſed to diſſolve the connection;—and the queſtion is as concerning this intention, and this effect.

I ſhall proceed yet farther to make a few very minute obſervations of the ſame nature: But if *Shakeſpeare* meant ſometimes rather to *impreſs* than explain, no circumſtances calculated to this end, either directly or by aſſociation, are too minute for notice. But however this may be, a more conciliating reaſon ſtill remains: The argument itſelf, like the tales of our Noveliſts, is a *vehicle* only; *theirs*, as they profeſs, of moral inſtruction; and *mine* of critical amuſement. The vindication of *Falſtaff*'s Courage deſerves not for its own ſake the leaſt ſober diſcuſſion; *Falſtaff* is the word only, *Shakeſpeare* is the *Theme:* And if thro' this channel, I can furniſh no irrational amuſement, the reader will not, perhaps, every where expect from me the ſtrict ſeverity of logical inveſtigation.

Falſtaff, then, it may be obſerved, was introduced into the world,—(at leaſt we are told ſo) by

by the name of *Oldcaſtle*.* This was aſſigning him an origin of nobility; but the family of that name diſclaiming any kindred with his vices, he was thereupon, as it is ſaid, ingrafted into another ſtock† ſcarcely leſs diſtinguiſhed, tho' fallen into indelible diſgraces; and by this means

* I believe the ſtage was in poſſeſſion of ſome rude outline of *Falſtaff* before the time of *Shakeſpeare*, under the name of *Sir John Oldcaſtle*; and I think it probable that this name was retained for a period in *Shakeſpeare*'s Hen. 4th. but changed to *Falſtaff* before the play was printed. The expreſſion of "*Old Lad of the Caſtle*," uſed by the Prince, does not however decidedly prove this; as it might have been only ſome known and familiar appellation too careleſly transferred from the old Play.

† I doubt if *Shakeſpeare* had Sir *John Faſtolfe* in his memory when he called the character under conſideration *Falſtaff*. The title and name of *Sir John* were transferred from *Oldcaſtle* not *Faſtolfe*, and there is no kind of ſimilarity in the characters. If he had *Faſtolfe* in his thought at all, it was that while he approached the name, he might make ſuch a departure from it as the difference of character ſeemed to require.

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he has been made, if the conjectures of certain critics are well founded, the Dramatic ſucceſſor, tho', having reſpect to chronology, the natural *proavus* of another Sir *John*, who was no leſs than a Knight of the moſt noble order of the Garter, but a name for ever diſhonoured by a frequent expoſure in that Drum-and-trumpet Thing called *The firſt part of Henry* VI. written doubtleſs, or rather exhibited, long before *Shakeſpeare* was born,* tho' afterwards repaired, I think, and

 furbiſhed

* It would be no difficult matter I think to prove that all thoſe Plays taken from the Engliſh chronicle, which are aſcribed to *Shakeſpeare*, were on the ſtage before his time, and that he was employed by the Players only to refit and repair; taking due care to retain the names of the characters and to preſerve all thoſe incidents which were the moſt popular. Some of theſe Plays, particularly the two parts of Hen. IV. have certainly received what may be called a *thorough repair*; that is, *Shakeſpeare* new-wrote them to the old names. In the latter part of Hen. V. ſome of the old materials remain; and in the Play which I have here cenſured (Hen. VI.) we ſee very little of the new. I ſhould conceive it would not be very difficult to feel one's way

furbiſhed up by him with here and there a little ſentiment and diction. This family, if any branch

way thro' theſe Plays, and diſtinguiſh every where the metal from the clay. Of the two Plays of Hen. IV. there has been, I have admitted, a complete tranſmutation, preſerving the old forms; but in the others, there is often no union or coaleſcence of parts, nor are any of them equal in merit to thoſe Plays more peculiarly and emphatically *Shakeſpeare's own.* The reader will be pleaſed to think that I do not reckon into the works of *Shakeſpeare* certain abſurd productions which his editors have been ſo good as to compliment him with. I object, and ſtrenuouſly too, even to *The Taming of the Shrew*; not that it wants merit, but that it does not bear the peculiar features and ſtamp of *Shakeſpeare.*

The rhyming parts of the Hiſtoric plays are all, I think, of an older date than the times of *Shakeſpeare.* —There was a Play, I believe, of *the Acts of King John*, of which the baſtard *Falconbridge* ſeems to have been the hero and the fool: He appears to have ſpoken altogether in rhyme. *Shakeſpeare* ſhews him to us in the latter part of the ſecond ſcene in the firſt act of *King John* in this condition; tho' he afterwards, in the courſe of the Play, thought fit to adopt him, to give him language and manners, and to make him his own.

branch of it remained in *Shakeſpeare*'s time, might have been proud of their Dramatic ally, if indeed they could have any fair pretence to claim as ſuch *him* whom *Shakeſpeare*, perhaps in contempt of Cowardice, wrote *Falſtaff*, not *Faſtolfe*, the true Hiſtoric name of the Gartered Craven.

In the age of Henry IV. a Family creſt and arms were authentic proofs of gentility; and this proof, among others, *Shakeſpeare* has furniſhed us with: *Falſtaff* always carried about him, it ſeems, *a Seal ring of his Grandfather's worth*, as he ſays, *forty marks:* The Prince indeed affirms, but not ſeriouſly I think, that this ring was *copper*. As to the exiſtence of the *bonds*, which were I ſuppoſe the negotiable ſecurities or paper-money of the time, and which he pretended to have loſt, I have nothing to ſay; but the ring, I believe, was really gold; tho' probably a little too much alloyed with baſer metal. But this is not the point: The *arms* were doubtleſs genuine; they were borne by his Grandfather, and are proofs of an antient gentility; a gentility doubtleſs, in

former periods, connected with wealth and poſſeſſions, tho' the gold of the family might have been tranſmuting by degrees, and perhaps, in the hands of *Falſtaff*, converted into little better than copper. This obſervation is made on the ſuppoſition of *Falſtaff*'s being conſidered as the head of the family, which I think however he ought not to be. It appears rather as if he ought to be taken in the light of a cadet or younger brother; which the familiar appellation of *John*, "the only one (as he ſays) given him by his bro-"thers and ſiſters," ſeems to indicate. Be this as it may, we find he is able, in ſpite of diſſipation, to keep up a certain *ſtate* and *dignity* of appearance; retaining no leſs than four, if not five, followers or men ſervants in his train. He appears alſo to have had apartments in town, and, by his invitations of *Maſter Gower* to dinner and to ſupper, a regular table: And one may infer farther from the Prince's queſtion, on his return from Wales, to *Bardolph*, "*Is your maſter* here *in London*," that he had likewiſe a houſe in the country. Slight proofs

proofs it muſt be confeſſed, yet the inferences are ſo probable, ſo buoyant, in their own nature, that they may well reſt on them. That he did not lodge at the Tavern is clear from the circumſtances of the arreſt. Theſe various occaſions of expence,—ſervants, taverns, houſes, and whores,— neceſſarily imply that *Falſtaff* muſt have had ſome funds which are not brought immediately under our notice. That theſe funds were not however adequate to his ſtyle of living is plain: Perhaps his train may be conſidered only as incumbrances, which the pride of family and the habit of former opulence might have brought upon his preſent poverty: I do not mean abſolute poverty, but call it ſo as relative to his expence. To have "*but ſeven groats* "*and two-pence in his purſe*" and a page to bear it, is truly ridiculous; and it is for that reaſon we become ſo familiar with its contents, "*He* "*can find*" he ſays, "*no remedy for this conſumption* "*of the purſe, borrowing does but linger and linger* "*it out; but the diſeaſe is incurable.*" It might well be deemed ſo in his courſe of diſſipation: But I

ſhall preſently ſuggeſt one ſource at leaſt of his ſupply much more conſtant and honourable than that of borrowing. But the condition of *Falſtaff* as to opulence or poverty is not very material to my purpoſe: It is enough if his birth was diſtinguiſhed, and his youth noted for gallantry and accompliſhments. To the firſt I have ſpoken, and as for the latter we ſhall not be at a loſs when we remember that "*he was in his youth a page to Thomas Mowbray Duke of Norfolk*;" a ſituation at that time ſought for by young men of the beſt families and firſt fortune. The houſe of every great noble was at that period a kind of Military ſchool; and it is probable that *Falſtaff* was ſingularly adroit at his exerciſes: "*He broke Schoggan's* "*head*," (ſome boiſterous fencer I ſuppoſe) "*when he was but a crack thus high.*" *Shallow* remembers him *as notedly ſkilful at backſword*; and he was at that period, according to his own humourous account, "*ſcarcely an eagle's talon in the* "*waiſt, and could have crept thro' an alderman's thumb* "*ring.*" Even at the age at which he is exhibited

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to us, we find him *foundering*, as he calls it, *nine ſcore and odd miles*, with wonderful expedition, to join the army of Prince John of Lancaſter; and declaring after the ſurrender of *Coleville*, that "*had he but a belly of any indifferency he were ſimply* "*the moſt active fellow in Europe.*" Nor ought we here to paſs over his Knighthood without notice. It was, I grant, intended by the author as a dignity which, like his Courage and his wit, was to be debaſed; his knighthood by low ſituations, his Courage by circumſtances and imputations of cowardice, and his wit by buffoonery. But how are we to ſuppoſe this honour was acquired? By that very Courage, it ſhould ſeem, which we ſo obſtinately deny him. It was not certainly given him, like a modern City Knighthood, for his wealth or gravity: It was in theſe days a Military honour, and an authentic badge of Military merit.

But *Falſtaff* was not only a Military Knight, he poſſeſs'd an honourable *penſion* into the bargain; the reward as well as retainer of ſervice, and which ſeems (beſides the favours per-

haps of Mrs. *Urſula*) to be the principal and only ſolid ſupport of his preſent expences. But let us refer to the paſſage. "*A pox of this gout, or a gout* "*of this pox*; *for one or the other plays the rogue with* "*my great toe*: *It is no matter if I do halt, I have the* "*wars for my colour and my penſion ſhall ſeem the more* "*reaſonable.*" The mention *Falſtaff* here makes of a penſion, has I believe been generally conſtrued to refer rather to *hope* than *poſſeſſion*, yet I know not why: For the poſſeſſive MY, *my penſion* (not *a* penſion) requires a different conſtruction. Is it that we cannot enjoy a wit, till we have ſtript him of every worldly advantage, and reduced him below the level of our envy? It may be perhaps for this reaſon among others that *Shakeſpeare* has ſo obſcured the better parts of *Falſtaff* and ſtolen them ſecretly on our feelings, inſtead of opening them fairly to the notice of our underſtandings. How careleſly, and thro' what bye-paths, as it were, of caſual inference is this fact of a penſion introduced! And how has he aſſociated it with misfortune and infirmity! Yet

I queſtion

I queſtion, however, if, in this one place the *Impreſſion* which was intended, be well and effectually made. It muſt be left to the reader to determine if in that maſs of things out of which *Falſtaff* is compounded, he ever conſidered a penſion as any part of the compoſition: A penſion however he appears to have had, one that halting could only ſeem to make more reaſonable, not more honourable. The inference ariſing from the fact, I ſhall leave to the reader. It is ſurely a circumſtance highly advantageous to *Falſtaff*, (I ſpeak of the penſions of former days) whether he be conſidered in the light of a ſoldier or a gentleman.

I cannot foreſee the temper of the reader, nor whether he be content to go along with me in theſe kind of obſervations. Some of the incidents which I have drawn out of the Play may appear too minute, whilſt yet they refer to principles, which may ſeem too general. Many points require explanation; ſomething ſhould be ſaid of the nature of *Shakeſpeare*'s Dramatic characters;

racters; * by what arts they were formed, and wherein they differ from thoſe of other writers; ſomething likewiſe more profeſſedly of *Shakeſpeare*

* The reader muſt be ſenſible of ſomething in the compoſition of *Shakeſpeare*'s characters, which renders them eſſentially different from thoſe drawn by other writers. The characters of every Drama muſt indeed be grouped; but in the groupes of other poets the parts which are not ſeen, do not in fact exiſt. But there is a certain roundneſs and integrity in the forms of *Shakeſpeare*, which give them an independence as well as a relation, inſomuch that we often meet with paſſages, which tho' perfectly felt, cannot be ſufficiently explained in words, without unfolding the whole character of the ſpeaker: And this I may be obliged to do in reſpect to that of *Lancaſter*, in order to account for ſome words ſpoken by him in cenſure of *Falſtaff*.—Something which may be thought too heavy for the *text*, I ſhall add *here*, as a conjecture concerning the compoſition of *Shakeſpeare*'s characters: Not that they were the effect, I believe, ſo much of a minute and laborious attention, as of a certain comprehenſive energy of mind, involving within itſelf all the effects of ſyſtem and of labour.

Bodies

ſpeare himſelf, and of the peculiar character of his genius. After ſuch a review we may not perhaps think any conſideration ariſing out of the

Bodies of all kinds, whether of metals, plants, or animals, are ſuppoſed to poſſeſs certain firſt principles of *being*, and to have an exiſtence independent of the accidents, which form their magnitude or growth: Thoſe accidents are ſuppoſed to be drawn in from the ſurrounding elements, but not indiſcriminately; each plant and each animal, imbibes thoſe things only, which are proper to its own diſtinct nature, and which have beſides ſuch a ſecret relation to each other as to be capable of forming a perfect union and coaleſcence: But ſo variouſly are the ſurrounding elements mingled and diſpoſed, that each particular body, even of thoſe under the ſame ſpecies, has yet ſome *peculiar* of its own. *Shakeſpeare* appears to have conſidered the being and growth of the human mind as analogous to this ſyſtem: There are certain qualities and capacities, which he ſeems to have conſidered as firſt principles; the chief of which are certain energies of courage and activity, according to their degrees; together with different degrees and ſorts of ſenſibilities, and a capacity, varying likewiſe in the *degree*, of diſcernment and intelligence. The reſt of the compoſition

the Play, or out of general nature, either as too minute or too extenſive.

Shakeſpeare is in truth, an author whoſe mimic creation agrees in general ſo perfectly with that of

tion is drawn in from an atmoſphere of ſurrounding things; that is, from the various influences of the different laws, religions and governments in the world; and from thoſe of the different ranks and inequalities in ſociety; and from the different profeſſions of men, encouraging or repreſſing paſſions of particular ſorts, and inducing different modes of thinking and habits of life; and he ſeems to have known intuitively what thoſe influences in particular were which this or that original conſtitution would moſt freely imbibe, and which would moſt eaſily aſſociate and coaleſce. But all theſe things being, in different ſituations, very differently diſpoſed, and thoſe differences exactly diſcerned by him, he found no difficulty in marking every individual, even among characters of the ſame ſort, with ſomething peculiar and diſtinct.—Climate and complexion demand their influence, "*Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee, and love thee after,*" is a ſentiment characteriſtic of, and fit only to be uttered by a *Moor*.

But

of nature, that it is not only wonderful in the great, but opens another ſcene of amazement to the diſcoveries of the microſcope. We have been charged indeed by a Foreign writer with an overmuch admiring of this *Barbarian*: Whether we have admired

But it was not enough for *Shakeſpeare* to have formed his characters with the moſt perfect truth and coherence; it was further neceſſary that he ſhould poſſeſs a wonderful facility of compreſſing, as it were, his own ſpirit into theſe images, and of giving alternate animation to the forms. This was not to be done *from without*; he muſt have *felt* every varied ſituation, and have ſpoken thro' the organ he had formed. Such an intuitive comprehenſion of things and ſuch a facility, muſt unite to produce a *Shakeſpeare*. The reader will not now be ſurpriſed if I affirm that thoſe characters in *Shakeſpeare*, which are ſeen only in part, are yet capable of being unfolded and underſtood in the whole; every part being in fact relative, and inferring all the reſt. It is true that the point of action or ſentiment, which we are moſt concerned in, is always held out for our ſpecial notice. But who does not perceive that there is a peculiarity about it, which conveys a reliſh of the whole? And very frequently, when

admired with knowledge, or have blindly followed thoſe feelings of affection which we could not reſiſt, I cannot tell; but certain it is, that to the labours of his Editors he has not been overmuch obliged. They are however for the moſt part of the firſt rank in literary fame; but ſome of

when no particular point preſſes, he boldly makes a character act and ſpeak from thoſe parts of the compoſition, which are *inferred* only, and not diſtinctly ſhewn. This produces a wonderful effect; it ſeems to carry us beyond the poet to nature itſelf, and gives an integrity and truth to facts and character, which they could not otherwiſe obtain: And this is in reality that art in *Shakeſpeare*, which being withdrawn from our notice, we more emphatically call *nature*. A felt propriety and truth from cauſes unſeen, I take to be the higheſt point of Poetic compoſition. If the characters of *Shakeſpeare* are thus *whole*, and as it were original, while thoſe of almoſt all other writers are mere imitation, it may be fit to conſider them rather as Hiſtoric than Dramatic beings; and, when occaſion requires, to account for their conduct from the *whole* of character, from general principles, from latent motives, and from policies not avowed.

of them had poſſeſſions of their own in Parnaſſus, of an extent too great and important to allow of a very diligent attention to the intereſts of others; and among thoſe Critics more profeſſionally ſo, the ableſt and the beſt has unfortunately looked more to the praiſe of ingenious than of juſt conjecture. The character of his emendations are not ſo much that of *right* or *wrong*, as that, being in the extreme, they are always *Warburtonian*. Another has ſince undertaken the cuſtody of our author, whom he ſeems to conſider as a ſort of wild Proteus or madman, and accordingly knocks him down with the butt-end of his critical ſtaff, as often as he exceeds that line of ſober diſcretion, which this learned Editor appears to have chalked out for him: Yet is this Editor notwithſtanding "a man take him for all in all," very highly reſpectable for his genius and his learning. What however may be chiefly complained of in theſe gentlemen is, that having erected themſelves into the condition, as it were, of guardians and

truſtees

truſtees of *Shakeſpeare*, they have never undertaken to diſcharge the diſgraceful incumbrances of ſome wretched productions, which have long hung heavy on his fame. Beſides the evidence of taſte, which indeed is not communicable, there are yet other and more general proofs that theſe incumbrances were not incurred by *Shakeſpeare*: The *Latin* ſentences diſperſed thro' the imputed traſh is, I think, of itſelf a deciſive one. *Love's Labour loſt* contains a very concluſive one of another kind; tho' the very laſt Editor has, I believe, in his critical ſagacity, ſuppreſſed the evidence, and withdrawn the record.

Yet whatever may be the neglect of ſome, or the cenſure of others, there are thoſe, who firmly believe that this wild, this uncultivated Barbarian, has not yet obtained one half of his fame; and who truſt that ſome new Stagyrite will ariſe, who inſtead of pecking at the ſurface of things will enter into the inward ſoul of his compoſitions, and expel by the force of congenial feelings

feelings, thoſe foreign impurities which have ſtained and diſgraced his page. And as to thoſe *ſpots* which will ſtill remain, they may perhaps become inviſible to thoſe who ſhall ſeek them thro' the medium of his beauties, inſtead of looking for thoſe beauties, as is too frequently done, thro' the ſmoke of ſome real or imputed obſcurity. When the hand of time ſhall have bruſhed off his preſent Editors and Commentators, and when the very name of *Voltaire*, and even the memory of the language in which he has written, ſhall be no more, the *Apalachian* mountains, the banks of the *Ohio*, and the plains of *Sciota* ſhall reſound with the accents of this Barbarian : In his native tongue he ſhall roll the genuine paſſions of nature ; nor ſhall the griefs of *Lear* be alleviated, or the charms and wit of *Roſalind* be abated by time. There is indeed nothing periſhable about him, except that very learning which he is ſaid ſo much to want. He had not, it is true, enough for the demands of the age in which he lived, but he had perhaps too much for the reach

of his genius, and the intereſt of his fame. *Milton* and he will carry the decayed remnants and fripperies of antient mythology into more diſtant ages than they are by their own force intitled to extend; and the metamorphoſes of *Ovid*, upheld by them, lay in a new claim to unmerited immortality.

Shakeſpeare is a name ſo intereſting, that it is excuſable to ſtop a moment, nay it would be indecent to paſs him without the tribute of ſome admiration. He differs eſſentially from all other writers: Him we may profeſs rather to feel than to underſtand; and it is ſafer to ſay, on many occaſions, that we are poſſeſſed by him, than that we poſſeſs him. And no wonder;—He ſcatters the ſeeds of things, the principles of character and action, with ſo cunning a hand yet with ſo careleſs an air, and, maſter of our feelings, ſubmits himſelf ſo little to our judgment, that every thing ſeems ſuperior. We diſcern not his courſe, we ſee no connection of cauſe and effect,

fect, we are rapt in ignorant admiration, and claim no kindred with his abilities. All the incidents, all the parts, look like chance, whilſt we feel and are ſenſible that the whole is deſign. His Characters not only act and ſpeak in ſtrict conformity to nature, but in ſtrict relation to us; juſt ſo much is ſhewn as is requiſite, juſt ſo much is impreſſed; he commands every paſſage to our heads and to our hearts, and moulds us as he pleaſes, and that with ſo much eaſe, that he never betrays his own exertions. We ſee theſe Characters act from the mingled motives of paſſion, reaſon, intereſt, habit and complection, in all their proportions, when they are ſuppoſed to know it not themſelves; and we are made to acknowledge that their actions and ſentiments are, from thoſe motives, the neceſſary reſult. He at once blends and diſtinguiſhes every thing;—every thing is complicated, every thing is plain. I reſtrain the further expreſſions of my admiration leſt they ſhould not ſeem applicable

to man; but it is really aſtoniſhing that a mere human being, a part of humanity only, ſhould ſo perfectly comprehend the whole; and that he ſhould poſſeſs ſuch exquiſite art, that whilſt every woman and every child ſhall feel the whole effect, his learned Editors and Commentators ſhould yet ſo very frequently miſtake or ſeem ignorant of the cauſe. A ſceptre or a ſtraw are in his hands of equal efficacy; he needs no ſelection; he converts every thing into excellence; nothing is too great, nothing is too baſe. Is a character efficient like *Richard*, it is every thing we can wiſh: Is it otherwiſe, like *Hamlet*, it is productive of equal admiration: Action produces one mode of excellence and inaction another: The Chronicle, the Novel, or the Ballad; the king, or the beggar, the hero, the madman, the ſot or the fool; it is all one;—nothing is worſe, nothing is better: The ſame genius pervades and is equally admirable in all. Or, is a character to be ſhewn in progreſſive change, and the events

of

of years comprized within the hour ;—with what a Magic hand does he prepare and ſcatter his ſpells ! The Underſtanding muſt, in the firſt place, be ſubdued ; and lo ! how the rooted prejudices of the child ſpring up to confound the man ! The Weird ſiſters riſe, and order is extinguiſhed. The laws of nature give way, and leave nothing in our minds but wildneſs and horror. No pauſe is allowed us for reflection : Horrid ſentiment, furious guilt and compunction, air-drawn daggers, murders, ghoſts, and inchantment, ſhake and *poſſeſs us wholly*. In the mean time the *proceſs* is completed. *Macbeth* changes under our eye, *the milk of human kindneſs is converted to gall* ; *he has ſupped full of horrors*, and his *May of life is fallen into the fear*, *the yellow leaf* ; whilſt we, the fools of amazement, are inſenſible to the ſhifting of place and the lapſe of time, and till the curtain drops, never once wake to the truth of things, or recognize the laws of exiſtence.—On ſuch an occaſion, a fellow, like *Rymer*,

waking from his trance, ſhall lift up his Conſtable's ſtaff, and charge this great Magician, this daring *practicer of arts inhibited*, in the name of *Ariſtotle*, to ſurrender; whilſt *Ariſtotle* himſelf, diſowning his wretched Officer, would fall proſtrate at his feet and acknowledge his ſupremacy.—O ſupreme of Dramatic excellence! (*might he ſay,*) not to me be imputed the inſolence of fools. The bards of *Greece* were confined within the narrow circle of the Chorus, and hence they found themſelves conſtrained to practice, for the moſt part, the preciſion, and copy the details of nature. I followed them, and knew not that a larger circle might be drawn, and the Drama extended to the whole reach of human genius. Convinced, I ſee that a more compendious *nature* may be obtained; a nature of *effects* only, to which neither the relations of place, or continuity of time, are always eſſential. Nature, condeſcending to the faculties and apprehenſions of man, has drawn through

through human life a regular chain of viſible cauſes and effects: But Poetry delights in ſurprize, conceals her ſteps, ſeizes at once upon the heart, and obtains the Sublime of things without betraying the rounds of her aſcent: True Poeſy is *magic*, not *nature*; an effect from cauſes hidden or unknown. To the Magician I preſcribed no laws; his law and his power are one; his power is his law. Him, who neither imitates, nor is within the reach of imitation, no precedent can or ought to bind, no limits to contain. If his end is obtained, who ſhall queſtion his courſe? Means, whether apparent or hidden, are juſtified in Poeſy by ſucceſs; but then moſt perfect and moſt admirable when moſt concealed *.—But

 whither

* Theſe obſervations have brought me ſo near to the regions of Poetic *magic*, (uſing the word here in its ſtrict and proper ſenſe, and not looſely as in the *text*) that tho' they lie not directly in my courſe, I yet may

 be

whither am I going! This copious and delightful topic has drawn me far beyond my deſign: I haſten back to my ſubject, and am guarded, for a time at leaſt, againſt any further temptation to digreſs.

I was

be allowed in this place to point the reader that way. A felt propriety, or truth of art, from an unſeen, tho' ſuppoſed adequate cauſe, we call *nature*. A like feeling of propriety and truth, ſuppoſed without a cauſe, or as ſeeming to be derived from cauſes inadequate, fantaſtic, and abſurd,—ſuch as wands, circles, incantations, and ſo forth,—we call by the general name *magic*, including all the train of ſuperſtition, witches, ghoſts, fairies, and the reſt.—*Reaſon* is confined to the line of viſible exiſtence; our *paſſions* and our *fancy* extend far beyond into the *obſcure*; but however lawleſs their operations may ſeem, the images they ſo wildly form have yet a relation to truth, and are the ſhadows at leaſt, however fantaſtic, of *reality*. I am not inveſtigating but paſſing this ſubject, and muſt therefore leave behind me much curious ſpeculation. Of Perſonifications however we ſhould obſerve that thoſe which are made out of abſtract ideas are the creatures of the Underſtanding only: Thus, of the mixed

I was conſidering the dignity of *Falſtaff* ſo far as it might ſeem connected with, or productive of military merit, and I have aſſigned him *reputation* at leaſt, if not *fame*, noble connection, birth, attendants, title, and an honourable

mixed modes, virtue, beauty, wiſdom and others,—what are they but very obſcure ideas of *qualities* conſidered as abſtracted from any *ſubject* whatever? The mind cannot ſteadily contemplate ſuch an abſtraction: What then does it do?—Invent or imagine a ſubject in order to ſupport theſe qualities; and hence we get the Nymphs or Goddeſſes of virtue, of beauty, or of wiſdom; the very obſcurity of the ideas being the cauſe of their converſion into ſenſible objects, with preciſion both of feature and of form. But as reaſon has its perſonifications, ſo has *paſſion*.—Every paſſion has its Object, tho' often diſtant and obſcure;—to be brought nearer then, and rendered more diſtinct, it is perſonified; and Fancy fantaſtically decks, or aggravates the *form*, and adds "a local habitation and a name." But paſſion is the *dupe* of its own artifice and *realiſes* the image it had formed. The Grecian theology was mixed of both theſe kinds of perſonification. Of the images produced by paſſion it muſt be obſerved that they are the

nourable penſion ; every one of them preſumptive proofs of Military merit, and motives of action. What deduction is to be made on theſe articles, and why they are ſo much obſcured may, perhaps, hereafter appear.

I have

the images, for the moſt part, not of the paſſions themſelves, but of their remote effects. *Guilt* looks through the medium, and beholds a devil; *fear*, ſpectres of every ſort; *hope*, a ſmiling cherub; *malice* and *envy* ſee hags, and witches, and inchanters dire; whilſt the innocent and the young, behold with fearful delight the tripping fairy, whoſe ſhadowy form the moon gilds with its ſofteſt beams.—Extravagant as all this appears, it has its laws ſo preciſe that we are ſenſible both of a local and temporary, and of an univerſal magic; the firſt derived from the general nature of the human mind, influenced by particular habits, inſtitutions, and climate; and the latter from the ſame general nature abſtracted from thoſe conſiderations: Of the firſt ſort the *machinery* in *Macbeth* is a very ſtriking inſtance; a machinery, which, however exquiſite at the time, has already loſt more than half its force; and the Gallery now laughs in ſome places where it ought to ſhudder:—But the magic of the *Tempeſt* is laſting and univerſal.

There

I have now gone through the examination of all the perſons of the Drama from whoſe mouths any thing can be drawn relative to the Courage of *Falſtaff*, excepting the *Prince* and *Poins*, whoſe evidence I have begged leave to *reſerve*, and

There is beſides a ſpecies of writing for which we have no term of art, and which holds a middle place between nature and magic; I mean where fancy either alone, or mingled with reaſon, or reaſon aſſuming the appearance of fancy, governs ſome real exiſtence; but the whole of this art is pourtrayed in a ſingle Play; in the real madneſs of *Lear*, in the aſſumed wildneſs of *Edgar*, and in the Profeſſional *Fantaſque* of the *Fool*, all operating to contraſt and heighten each other. There is yet another feat in this kind, which *Shakeſpeare* has performed;—he has perſonified *malice* in his *Caliban*; a character kneaded up of three diſtinct natures, the diabolical, the human, and the brute. The reſt of his preternatural beings are images of *effects* only, and cannot ſubſiſt but in a ſurrounding atmoſphere of thoſe paſſions, from which they are derived. *Caliban* is the paſſion itſelf, or rather a compound of malice, ſervility, and luſt, *ſubſtantiated*; and therefore beſt ſhewn in contraſt with the lightneſs of *Ariel*

and excepting a very ſevere cenſure paſſed on him by Lord *John* of *Lancaſter*, which I ſhall preſently conſider: But I muſt firſt obſerve, that ſetting aſide the jeſts of the *Prince* and *Poins*, and this cenſure of *Lancaſter*, there is not one expreſſion

Ariel and the innocence of *Miranda*.—*Witches* are ſometimes ſubſtantial exiſtences, ſuppoſed to be poſſeſſed by, or allyed to the unſubſtantial; but the Witches in *Macbeth* are a groſs ſort of ſhadows, "bubbles of the earth," as they are finely called by *Banquo*.—*Ghoſts* differ from other imaginary beings in this, that they belong to no element, have no ſpecific nature or character, and are effects, however harſh the expreſſion, ſuppoſed without a cauſe; the reaſon of which is that they are not the creation of the poet, but the ſervile copies or tranſcripts of popular imagination, connected with ſuppoſed reality and religion. Should the poet aſſign the true cauſe, and call them the mere painting or *coinage of the brain*, he would diſappoint his own end, and deſtroy the being he had raiſed. Should he aſſign fictitious cauſes, and add a ſpecific nature, and a local habitation, it would not be endured; or the effect would be loſt by the converſion of one being into another. The approach to reality in this caſe defeats

expreſſion uttered by any character in the Drama that can be conſtrued into any impeachment of *Falſtaff*'s Courage;—an obſervation made before as reſpecting ſome of the Witneſſes;—it is now extended to all: And though this ſilence be a negative proof only, it cannot, in my opinion, under the circumſtances of the caſe, and whilſt uncontradicted by facts, be too much relied on. If *Falſtaff* had been intended for the character of a *Miles Glorioſus*, his behaviour ought, and therefore would have been commented upon by others. *Shakeſpeare* ſeldom truſts to the apprehenſions of his audience; his characters interpret for one another continually, and when we leaſt ſuſpect ſuch artful and ſecret management

defeats all the arts and managements of fiction.—The whole play of the *Tempeſt* is of ſo high and ſuperior a nature that *Dryden*, who had attempted to imitate in vain, might well exclaim that

"—*Shakeſpeare*'s *magic* could not copied be,
"Within that circle none durſt walk but He."

management: The conduct of *Shakeſpeare* in this reſpect is admirable, and I could point out a thouſand paſſages which might put to ſhame the advocates of a formal Chorus, and prove that there is as little of neceſſity as grace in ſo mechanic a contrivance *. But I confine my cenſure of the Chorus to its ſuppoſed uſe of comment and interpretation only.

Falſtaff is, indeed, ſo far from appearing to my eye in the light of a *Miles Glorioſus*, that in the beſt of my taſte and judgment, he does not diſcover, except in conſequence of the robbery, the leaſt *trait* of ſuch a character. All his boaſting ſpeeches are humour, mere humour, and carefully ſpoken to perſons who cannot miſapprehend them, who cannot be impoſed on: They contain indeed, for the moſt part, an unreaſonable and imprudent ridicule of

* Ænobarbus, in Anthony and Cleopatra, is in effect the Chorus of the Play; as Menenius Agrippa is of Coriolanus.

of himſelf, the uſual ſubject of his good humoured merriment; but in the company of ignorant people, ſuch as the Juſtices, or his own followers, he is remarkably reſerved, and does not hazard any thing, even in the way of humour, that may be ſubject to miſtake: Indeed he no where ſeems to ſuſpect that his character is open to cenſure on this ſide, or that he needs the arts of impoſition.—"*Turk Gregory* "*never did ſuch deeds in arms as I have done this* "*day*," is ſpoken, whilſt he breathes from action, to the Prince in a tone of jolly humour, and contains nothing but a light ridicule of his own inactivity: This is as far from real boaſting as his ſaying before the battle, "*Wou'd it* "*were bed-time*, Hal, *and all were well*," is from meanneſs or depreſſion. This articulated wiſh is not the fearful outcry of a *Coward*, but the frank and honeſt breathing of a *generous fellow*, who does not expect to be ſeriouſly reproached with the character. Inſtead indeed, of deſerving the name of a vain glorious *Coward*, his

modeſty

modeſty perhaps on this head, and whimſical ridicule of himſelf, have been a principal ſource of the imputation.

But to come to the very ſerious reproach thrown upon him by that *cold blooded* boy, as he calls him, *Lancaſter.*—*Lancaſter* makes a ſolemn treaty of peace with the *Archbiſhop of York*, *Mowbray*, &c. upon the faith of which they diſperſe their troops; which is no ſooner done than *Lancaſter* arreſts the Principals, and purſues the *ſcattered ſtray:* A tranſaction, by the bye, ſo ſingularly perfidious, that I wiſh *Shakeſpeare*, for his own credit, had not ſuffered it to paſs under his pen without marking it with the blackeſt ſtrokes of Infamy.—During this tranſaction, *Falſtaff* arrives, joins in the purſuit, and takes Sir *John Coleville* priſoner. Upon being ſeen by *Lancaſter* he is thus addreſſed:—

"*Now*

" *Now Falſtaff, where have you been all this while ?*
" *When every thing is over then you come :*
" *Theſe tardy tricks of yours will, on my life,*
" *One time or other break ſome gallows' back.*"

This may appear to many a very formidable paſſage. It is ſpoken, as we may ſay, in the hearing of the army, and by one intitled as it were by his ſtation to decide on military conduct; and if no puniſhment immediately follows, the forbearance may be imputed to a regard for the Prince of Wales, whoſe favour the delinquent was known ſo unworthily to poſſeſs. But this reaſoning will by no means apply to the real circumſtances of the caſe. The effect of this paſſage will depend on the credit we ſhall be inclined to give to *Lancaſter* for integrity and candour, and ſtill more upon the facts which are the ground of this cenſure, and which are fairly offered by *Shakeſpeare* to our notice.

We will examine the evidence ariſing from both; and to this end we muſt in the firſt place a little unfold the character of this young Commander in chief;—from a review of which we may more clearly diſcern the general impulſes and ſecret motives of his conduct: And this is a proceeding which I think the peculiar character of *Shakeſpeare*'s Drama will very well juſtify.

We are already well prepared what to think of this young man:—We have juſt ſeen a very pretty manœuvre of his in a matter of the higheſt moment, and have therefore the leſs reaſon to be ſurprized if we find him practiſing a more petty fraud with ſuitable ſkill and addreſs. He appears in truth to have been what *Falſtaff* calls him, *a cold reſerved ſober-blooded boy*; a politician, as it ſhould ſeem, by nature; bred up moreover in the ſchool of *Bolingbroke* his father, and tutored to betray: With ſufficient courage and ability perhaps, but with too much of the knave

knave in his compoſition, and too little of enthuſiaſm, ever to be a great and ſuperior character. That ſuch a youth as this ſhould, even from the propenſities of character alone, take any plauſible occaſion to injure a frank unguarded man of wit and pleaſure, will not appear unnatural. But he had other inducements. *Falſtaff* had given very general ſcandal by his diſtinguiſhed wit and noted poverty, inſomuch that a little cruelty and injuſtice towards him was likely to paſs, in the eye of the grave and prudent part of mankind, as a very creditable piece of fraud, and to be accounted to *Lancaſter* for virtue and good ſervice. But *Lancaſter* had motives yet more prevailing; *Falſtaff* was a Favourite, without the power which belongs to that character; and the tone of the Court was ſtrongly againſt him, as the miſleader and corrupter of the Prince; who was now at too great a diſtance to afford him immediate countenance and protection. A ſcratch then, between jeſt and earneſt as it

were, ſomething that would not too much offend the prince, yet would leave behind a diſgraceful ſcar upon *Falſtaff*, was very ſuitable to the temper and ſituation of parties and affairs. With theſe obſervations in our thought let us return to the paſſage: It is plainly intended for diſgrace, but how artful, how cautious, how inſidious is the manner! It may paſs for ſheer pleaſantry and humour: *Lancaſter* aſſumes the familiar phraſe and *girding* tone of *Harry*; and the gallows, as he words it, appears to be in the moſt danger from an encounter with *Falſtaff*.—With reſpect to the matter, 'tis a kind of *miching malicho*; it means miſchief indeed, but there is not preciſion enough in it to intitle it to the appellation of a formal charge, or to give to *Falſtaff* any certain and determined ground of defence. *Tardy tricks* may mean, not Cowardice but neglect only, though the *manner* may ſeem to carry the imputation to both.—The reply of *Falſtaff* is exactly ſuited to the qualities of the ſpeech;—for

Falſtaff

Falſtaff never wants ability but conduct only. He anſwers the general effect of this ſpeech, by a feeling and ſerious complaint of injuſtice; he then goes on to apply his defence to the vindication both of his diligence and courage; but he deſerts by degrees his ſerious tone, and taking the handle of pleaſantry which *Lancaſter* had held forth to him, he is prudently content, as being ſenſible of *Lancaſter*'s high rank and ſtation, to let the whole paſs off in buffoonery and humour. But the queſtion is, however, not concerning the adroitneſs and management of either party: Our buſineſs is, after putting the credit of *Lancaſter* out of the queſtion, to diſcover what there may be of truth and of fact either in the charge of the one, or the defence of the other. From this only, we ſhall be able to draw our inferences with fairneſs and with candour. The charge againſt *Falſtaff* is already in the poſſeſſion of the reader: The defence follows.—

Falſ. "*I would be ſorry, my lord, but it ſhould* "*be thus: I never knew yet but that rebuke and* "*check were the reward of valour. Do you think* "*me a ſwallow, an arrow, or a bullet? Have I* "*in my poor and old motion the expedition of* "*thought? I ſpeeded hither within the very ex-* "*tremeſt inch of poſſibility. I have foundered nine-* "*ſcore and odd poſts*, (deſerting by degrees his "ſerious tone, for *one* of more addreſs and ad- "vantage) *and here travel-tainted as I am, have I* "*in my pure and immaculate valour taken Sir John* "*Coleville of the dale, a moſt furious Knight and* "*valorous enemy.*"

Falſtaff's anſwer then is, that he uſed all poſſible expedition to join the army; the not doing of which, with an implication of Cowardice as the cauſe, is the utmoſt extent of the charge againſt him; and to take off this implication he refers to the evidence of a fact preſent and manifeſt,—the ſurrender of *Coleville*; in whoſe hearing he ſpeaks, and to whom therefore

therefore he is ſuppoſed to appeal. Nothing then remains but that we ſhould inquire if *Falſtaff*'s anſwer was really founded in truth; "*I ſpeeded hither*, ſays he, *within the extremeſt inch* "*of poſſibility:*" If it be ſo, he is juſtified: But I am afraid, for we muſt not conceal any thing, that *Falſtaff* was really detained too long by his debaucheries in London; at leaſt, if we take the Chief Juſtice's words very ſtrictly.

"Ch. Juſt. *How now, Sir John? What are you* "*brawling here? Doth this become your* PLACE, *your* "TIME, *your* BUSINESS? *You ſhould have been well* "*on your way to York.*"

Here then ſeems to be a delay worthy perhaps of rebuke; and if we could ſuppoſe *Lancaſter* to mean nothing more by *tardy tricks* than idleneſs and debauch, I ſhould not poſſibly think myſelf much concerned to vindicate *Falſtaff* from the charge; but the words imply, to my apprehenſion, a deſigned and deliberate

avoidance of danger. Yet to the contrary of this we are furniſhed with very full and complete evidence. *Falſtaff*, the moment he quits London, diſcovers the utmoſt eagerneſs and impatience to join the army; he gives up his gluttony, his mirth, and his eaſe. We ſee him take up in his paſſage ſome recruits at *Shallow*'s houſe; and tho' he has pecuniary views upon *Shallow*, no inducement ſtops him; he takes no refreſhment, he cannot *tarry dinner*, he hurries off; "*I will not*, ſays he to the Juſtices, "*uſe many words with you. Fare ye well Gentle-*"*men both*; *I thank ye, I muſt a dozen miles to night.*"— He miſuſes, it is true, at this time the *King's Preſs damnably*; but that does not concern me, at leaſt not for the preſent; it belongs to other parts of his character.—It appears then manifeſtly that *Shakeſpeare* meant to ſhew *Falſtaff* as really uſing the utmoſt ſpeed in his power; he arrives almoſt literally *within the extremeſt inch of poſſibility*; and if *Lancaſter* had not accelerated the event by a ſtroke of perfidy much

much more ſubject to the imputation of Cowardice than the *Debauch* of *Falſtaff*, he would have been time enough to have ſhared in the danger of a fair and honeſt deciſion. But great men have it ſeems a priviledge; "*that in the* General's *but a choleric word*, "*which in the* Soldier *were flat blaſphemy.*" Yet after all, *Falſtaff* did really come time enough, as it appears, to join in the villainous triumphs of the day, to take priſoner *Coleville of the dale, a moſt furious Knight and valorous enemy.*—Let us look to the fact. If this incident ſhould be found to contain any ſtriking proof of *Falſtaff*'s Courage and Military fame, his defence againſt *Lancaſter* will be ſtronger than the reader has even a right to demand. *Falſtaff* encounters *Coleville* in the field, and having demanded his name, is ready to aſſail him; but *Coleville* aſks him if he is not Sir *John Falſtaff*; thereby implying a purpoſe of ſurrender. *Falſtaff* will not ſo much as furniſh him with a pretence, and anſwers only,

only, that *he is as good a man.* "*Do you yield Sir, or ſhall I ſweat for you?* "*I think*, ſays Coleville "*you are Sir John Falſtaff, and in that thought* "*yield me.*" This fact, and the incidents with which it is accompanied, ſpeak loudly; it ſeems to have been contrived by the author on purpoſe to take off a rebuke ſo authoritatively made by *Lancaſter.* The fact is ſet before our eyes to confute the cenſure: *Lancaſter* himſelf ſeems to give up his charge, tho' not his ill will; for upon *Falſtaff*'s aſking leave to paſs through Gloſterſhire, and artfully deſiring that, upon *Lancaſter*'s return to Court, *he might ſtand well in his report, Lancaſter* ſeems in his anſwer to mingle malice and acquital. "*Fare ye well*, Falſtaff, *I in my* "*condition ſhall better ſpeak of you than you deſerve. I would*, ſays Falſtaff, who is left behind in the ſcene, "*You had but the* "*wit*; *'twere better than your Dukedom.*" He continues on the ſtage ſome time chewing the cud of diſhonour, which, with all his facility,

he

he cannot well ſwallow. "*Good faith*" ſays he, accounting to himſelf as well as he could for the injurious conduct of *Lancaſter*; "*this* "*ſober-blooded boy does not love me.*" This he might well believe. "*A man*, ſays he, *cannot* "*make him laugh*; *there's none of theſe demure* "*boys come to any proof*; *but that's no marvel*, "*they drink no ſack.*"—*Falſtaff* then it ſeems knew no drinker of ſack who was a Coward; at leaſt the inſtance was not home and familiar to him.—"*They all*, ſays he, *fall into a kind* "*of Male green ſickneſs, and are generally fools and Cowards.*" Anger has a privilege, and I think *Falſtaff* has a right to turn the tables upon *Lancaſter* if he can; but *Lancaſter* was certainly no fool, and I think upon the whole, no Coward; yet the Male green ſickneſs which *Falſtaff* talks of, ſeems to have infected his manners and aſpect, and taken from him all external indication of gallantry and courage. He behaves in the battle of Shrewſbury beyond the promiſe of his complexion and deportment:

"*By*

"*By heaven thou haſt deceived me Lancaſter*, ſays Harry, "*I did not think thee Lord of ſuch a ſpirit!* Nor was his father leſs ſurprized "*at his holding Lord Percy at the point with luſtier maintenance than he did look for from ſuch an unripe warrior.*" But how well and unexpectedly ſoever he might have behaved upon that occaſion, he does not ſeem to have been of a temper to truſt fortune too much or too often with his ſafety; therefore it is that, in order to keep the event in his own hands, he loads the Die, in the preſent caſe, with villainy and deceit: The event however he piouſly aſcribes, like a wiſe and prudent youth as he is, without paying that worſhip to himſelf which he ſo juſtly merits, to the ſpecial favour and interpoſition of Heaven.

"*Strike up your drums, purſue the ſcattered ſtray.*
"*Heaven, and not we, have ſafely fought to-day.*"

But the prophane *Falſtaff*, on the contrary, leſs informed and leſs ſtudious of ſupernatural things,

things, imputes the whole of this conduct to thin potations, and the not drinking largely of good and excellent *ſherris*; and ſo little doubt does he ſeem to entertain of the Cowardice and ill diſpoſition of this youth, that he ſtands deviſing cauſes, and caſting about for an hypotheſis on which the whole may be phyſically explained and accounted for;—but I ſhall leave him and Doctor *Cadogan* to ſettle that point as they may.

The only ſerious charge againſt *Falſtaff*'s Courage, we have now at large examined; it came from great authority, from the Commander in chief, and was meant as chaſtiſement and rebuke; but it appears to have been founded in ill-will, in the particular character of *Lancaſter*, and in the wantonneſs and inſolence of power; and the author has placed near, and under our notice, full and ample proofs of its injuſtice.—And thus the deeper we look into *Falſtaff*'s character, the ſtronger is our conviction that he was not intended

tended to be ſhewn as a Conſtitutional coward: Cenſure cannot lay ſufficient hold on him,—and even malice turns away, and more than half pronounces his acquittal.

But as yet we have dealt principally in parole and circumſtantial evidence, and have referred to *Fact* only incidentally. But *Facts* have a much more operative influence: They may be produced, not as arguments only, but Records; not to diſpute alone, but to decide.—It is time then to behold *Falſtaff* in actual ſervice as a ſoldier, in danger, and in battle. We have already diſplayed one fact in his defence againſt the cenſure of *Lancaſter*; a fact extremely unequivocal and deciſive. But the reader knows I have others, and doubtleſs goes before me to the action at *Shrewſbury*. In the midſt and in the heat of battle we ſee him come forwards;—what are his words? "*I "have led my Rag-o-muffians where they are peppered*; "*there's not three of my hundred and fifty left alive.*"

But

But to *whom* does he ſay this? To himſelf only; he ſpeaks *in ſoliloquy*. There is no queſtioning the fact, *he had* led *them*; *they were peppered*; *there were not* three *left alive*. He was in luck, being in bulk equal to any two of them, to eſcape unhurt. Let the author anſwer for that, I have nothing to do with it: He was the Poetic maker of the whole *Corps*, and he might diſpoſe of them as he pleaſed. Well might the Chief juſtice, as we now find, acknowledge *Falſtaff*'s ſervices in this day's battle; an acknowledgment, which amply confirms the fact. A Modern officer, who had performed a feat of this kind, would expect, not only the praiſe of having done his duty, but the appellation of a hero. But poor *Falſtaff* has too much wit to thrive: In ſpite of probability, in ſpite of inference, in ſpite of fact, he muſt be a Coward ſtill. He happens unfortunately to have more Wit than Courage, and therefore we are maliciouſly determined that he ſhall have no Courage at all. But let us ſuppoſe that his modes of expreſ-

ſion

ſion, even *in ſoliloquy*, will admit of ſome abatement ;—how much ſhall we abate ? Say that he brought off *fifty* inſtead of *three* ; yet a Modern captain would be apt to look big after an action with two thirds of his men, as it were, in his belly. Surely *Shakeſpeare* never meant to exhibit this man as a Conſtitutional coward ; if he did, his means were ſadly deſtructive of his end. We ſee him, after he had expended his Rag-o-muffians, with ſword and target in the midſt of battle, in perfect poſſeſſion of himſelf, and replete with humour and jocularity. He was, I preſume, in ſome immediate perſonal danger, in danger alſo of a general defeat ; too corpulent for flight ; and to be led a priſoner was probably to be led to execution ; yet we ſee him laughing and eaſy, offering a bottle of ſack to the Prince inſtead of a piſtol, punning, and telling him, "*there was that which would* ſack *a* "*city.*"—"*What is it a time*, (ſays the Prince) "*to jeſt and dally now ?*" No, a ſober character would

would not jeſt on ſuch an occaſion, but a Coward could not; he would neither have the inclination, or the power. And what could ſupport *Falſtaff* in ſuch a ſituation? Not principle; he is not ſuſpected of the Point of honour; he ſeems indeed fairly to renounce it. "*Ho-*
"*nour cannot ſet a leg or an arm*; *it has no ſkill in*
"*ſurgery*:—*What is it? a word only*; *meer air. It*
"*is inſenſible to the dead*; *and detraction will not*
"*let it live with the living.*" What then, but a ſtrong natural conſtitutional Courage, which nothing could extinguiſh or diſmay?—In the following paſſages the true character of *Falſtaff* as to Courage and Principle is finely touched, and the different colours at once nicely blended and diſtinguiſhed. "*If Percy be alive, I'll* pierce
"*him. If he do come in my way,* ſo:—*If he*
"*do not, if I come in* his *willingly, let him make a*
"*Carbonado of me. I like not ſuch grinning honour*
"*as Sir Walter hath*; *give me life*; *which, if I can*
"*ſave,* ſo; *if not, honour comes unlook'd for, and*
"*there's an end.*" One cannot ſay which pre-

vails moſt here, profligacy or courage; they are both tinged alike by the ſame humour, and mingled in one common maſs; yet when we conſider the ſuperior force of *Percy*, as we muſt preſently alſo that of *Douglas*, we ſhall be apt, I believe, in our ſecret heart, to forgive him. Theſe paſſages are ſpoken in ſoliloquy and in battle: If every ſoliloquy made under ſimilar circumſtances were as audible as *Falſtaff*'s, the imputation might perhaps be found too general for cenſure. Theſe are among the paſſages that have impreſſed on the world an idea of Cowardice in *Falſtaff*;—yet why? He is reſolute to take his fate: If *Percy* do come in his way, *ſo*;—if not, he will not ſeek inevitable deſtruction; he is willing to ſave his life, but if that cannot be, why,—"honour comes unlook'd for, and there's an end." This ſurely is not the language of Cowardice: It contains neither the Bounce or Whine of the character; he derides, it is true, and ſeems to renounce that grinning idol of Military zealots, *Honour*. But

Falſtaff

Falſtaff was a kind of Military free-thinker, and has accordingly incurred the obloquy of his condition. He ſtands upon the ground of natural Courage only and common ſenſe, and has, it ſeems, too much wit for a hero.—But let me be well underſtood;—I do not juſtify *Falſtaff* for renouncing the point of honour; it proceeded doubtleſs from a general relaxation of mind, and profligacy of temper. Honour is calculated to aid and ſtrengthen natural courage, and lift it up to heroiſm; but natural courage, which can act as ſuch without honour, is natural courage ſtill; the very quality I wiſh to maintain to *Falſtaff*. And if, without the aid of honour, he can act with firmneſs, his portion is only the more eminent and diſtinguiſhed. In ſuch a character, it is to his actions, not his ſentiments, that we are to look for conviction. But it may be ſtill further urged in behalf of *Falſtaff*, that there may be falſe honour as well as falſe religion. It is true; yet even in that caſe, candour obliges

me to confeſs, that the beſt men are moſt diſpoſed to conform, and moſt likely to become the dupes of their own virtue. But it may however be more reaſonably urged, that there are particular tenets both in honour and religion, which it is the groſsneſs of folly not to queſtion. To ſeek out, to court aſſured deſtruction, without leaving a ſingle benefit behind, may be well reckoned in the number: And this is preciſely the very folly which *Falſtaff* ſeems to abjure;—nor are we, perhaps intitled to ſay more, in the way of cenſure, than that he had not virtue enough to become the dupe of honour, nor prudence enough to hold his tongue. I am willing however, if the reader pleaſes, to compound this matter, and acknowledge, on my part, that *Falſtaff* was in all reſpects the *old ſoldier*; that he had put himſelf under the ſober diſcipline of diſcretion, and renounced, in a great degree at leaſt, what he might call, the Vanities and Superſtitions of honour; if the reader

will

will, on his part, admit that this might well be, without his renouncing, at the ſame time, the natural firmneſs and reſolution he was born to.

But there is a formidable objection behind. *Falſtaff* counterfeits baſely on being attacked by *Douglas*; he aſſumes, in a cowardly ſpirit, the appearance of death to avoid the reality. But there was no equality of force; not the leaſt chance for victory, or life. And is it the duty then, *think we ſtill*, of true Courage, to meet, without benefit to ſociety, *certain death?* Or is it only the phantaſy of honour?—But ſuch a fiction is highly diſgraceful;—true, and a man of nice honour might perhaps have *grinned* for it. But we muſt remember that *Falſtaff* had a double character; he was a *wit* as well as a *ſoldier*; and his Courage, however eminent, was but the *acceſſary*; his wit was the *principal*; and the part, which, if they ſhould come in competition, he had the

greateſt intereſt in maintaining. Vain indeed were the licentiouſneſs of his principles, if he ſhould ſeek death like a bigot, yet without the meed of honour; when he might live by wit, and encreaſe the reputation of that wit by living. But why do I labour this point? It has been already anticipated, and our improved acquaintance with *Falſtaff* will now require no more than a ſhort narrative of the fact.

Whilſt in the battle of Shrewſbury he is exhorting and encouraging the Prince who is engaged with the *Spirit Percy*—"*Well ſaid Hal, to him Hal*,"—he is himſelf attacked by the *Fiend Douglas*. There was no match; nothing remained but death or ſtratagem; grinning honour, or laughing life. But an expedient offers, a mirthful one,—Take your choice *Falſtaff*, a point of honour, or a point of drollery.—It could not be a queſtion;—*Falſtaff* falls, *Douglas* is cheated, and the world laughs. But does he fall like a Coward? No

No, like a buffoon only; the ſuperior principle prevails, and *Falſtaff* lives by a ſtratagem growing out of his character, to prove himſelf *no counterfeit*, to jeſt, to be employed, and to fight again. That *Falſtaff* valued himſelf, and expected to be valued by others, upon this piece of ſaving wit is plain. It was a ſtratagem, it is true; it argued preſence of mind; but it was moreover, what he moſt liked, a very laughable joke; and as ſuch he conſiders it; for he continues to counterfeit after the danger is over, that he may alſo deceive the Prince, and improve the event into more laughter. He might, for ought that appears, have concealed the tranſaction; the Prince was too earneſtly engaged for obſervation; he might have formed a thouſand excuſes for his fall; but he lies ſtill and liſtens to the pronouncing of his epitaph by the Prince with all the waggiſh glee and levity of his character. The circumſtance of his wounding *Percy* in the thigh, and carrying

the dead body on his back like luggage, is *indecent* but not cowardly. The declaring, though in jeſt, that he killed *Percy*, ſeems to me *idle*, but it is not meant or calculated for *impoſition*; it is ſpoken to the *Prince himſelf*, the man in the world who could not be, or be ſuppoſed to be impoſed on. But we muſt hear, whether to the purpoſe or not, what it is that *Harry* has to ſay over the remains of his old friend.

P. Hen. What old acquaintance! could not
all this fleſh
Keep in a little life? Poor *Jack* farewell!
I could have better ſpared a better man.
Oh! I ſhou'd have a heavy miſs of thee,
If I were much in love with vanity.
Death hath not ſtruck ſo fat a *deer* to-day,
Tho' many a *dearer* in this bloody fray;
Imbowelled will I ſee thee by and by;
Till then, in blood by noble *Percy* lye.

This

This is wonderfully proper for the occaſion; it is affectionate, it is pathetic, yet it remembers his vanities, and, with a faint gleam of recollected mirth, even his plumpneſs and corpulency; but it is a pleaſantry ſoftned and rendered even vapid by tenderneſs, and it goes off in the ſickly effort of a miſerable pun*.—But to our immediate purpoſe,—why is not his Cowardice remembered too? what no ſurprize that *Falſtaff* ſhould

* The cenſure commonly paſſed on *Shakeſpeare*'s *puns*, is, I think, not well founded. I remember but very few, which are undoubtedly his, that may not be juſtifyed; and if *ſo*, a greater inſtance cannot be given of the art which he ſo peculiarly poſſeſſed of converting baſe things into excellence.

"For if the Jew do cut but deep enough,
"I'll pay the forfeiture *with all my heart.*"

A play upon words is the moſt that can be expected from one who affects gaiety under the preſſure of ſevere misfortunes; but ſo imperfect, ſo broken a gleam, can

ſhould lye by the ſide of the noble *Percy* in the bed of honour! No reflection that flight, though unfettered by diſeaſe, could not avail; that fear could not find a ſubterfuge from death? Shall his corpulency and his vanities be recorded, and his more characteriſtic quality of Cowardice, even in the moment that it particularly demanded notice and reflection, be forgotten? If by ſparing a better man be here meant a *better ſoldier*, there is no doubt but there were better Soldiers in the army, more active, more young, more principled, more knowing; but none, it ſeems, taken for all in all, more acceptable. The comparative *better* uſed here leaves to *Falſtaff* the praiſe at leaſt of *good*; and to be a good ſoldier, is

can only ſerve more plainly to diſcloſe the gloom and darkneſs of the mind; it is an effort of fortitude, which failing in its operation, becomes the trueſt, becauſe the moſt unaffected *pathos*; and a ſkilful actor, well managing his tone and action, might with this miſerable pun, ſteep a whole audience ſuddenly in tears.

is to be a great way from Coward. But *Falſtaff*'s goodneſs, in this ſort, appears to have been not only enough to redeem him from diſgrace, but to mark him with reputation; if I was to add with *eminence* and *diſtinction*, the funeral honours, which are intended for his obſequies, and his being bid, till then, *to lye in blood by the noble Percy*, would fairly bear me out.

Upon the whole of the paſſages yet before us, why may I not reaſonably hope that the good natured reader, (and I write to no other) not offended at the levity of this exerciſe, may join with me in thinking that the character of *Falſtaff* as to valour, may be fairly and honeſtly ſummed up in the very words which he himſelf uſes to *Harry*; and which ſeem, as to this point, to be intended by *Shakeſpeare* as a *Compendium* of his character. "*What*, ſays the Prince, *a Coward Sir John Paunch!*" *Falſtaff* replies, "*Indeed I* "*am not* John of Gaunt *your grandfather*, *but yet* "no Coward, *Hal.*"

The

The robbery at *Gadſhill* comes now to be conſidered. But *here*, after ſuch long argumentation, we may be allowed to breath a little.

I know not what Impreſſion has been made on the reader; a good deal of evidence has been produced, and much more remains to be offered. But how many ſorts of men are there whom no evidence can perſuade! How many, who ignorant of *Shakeſpeare*, or forgetful of the text, may as well read heathen Greek, or the laws of the land, as this unfortunate Commentary? How many, who proud and pedantic, hate all novelty, and damn it without mercy under one compendious word, Paradox? How many more, who not deriving their opinions immediately from the ſovereignty of reaſon, hold at the will of ſome ſuperior lord, to whom accident or inclination has attached them, and who, true to their vaſſalage, are reſolute not to ſurrender, without expreſs permiſſion, their baſe and ill-gotten poſſeſſions. Theſe, however habited, are the

the mob of mankind, who hoot and holla, hiſs or huzza, juſt as their various leaders may direct. I *challenge* the whole Pannel as not holding by free tenure, and therefore not competent to the purpoſe either of condemnation or acquittal. But to the men of very nice honour what ſhall be ſaid? I ſpeak not of your men of good ſervice, but ſuch as Mr. * * * * "*Souls made of fire*, and *children of the ſun*." Theſe gentlemen, I am ſadly afraid, cannot in honour or prudence admit of any compoſition in the very nice article of Courage; *ſuſpicion* is *diſgrace*, and they cannot ſtay to parley with diſhonour. The miſfortune in caſes of this kind, is, that it is not eaſy to obtain a fair and impartial Jury: When we cenſure others with an eye to our own applauſe, we are as ſeldom ſparing of reproach, as inquiſitive into circumſtance; and bold is the man, who tenacious of juſtice, ſhall venture to weigh circumſtances, or draw lines of diſtinction between Cowardice and any apparently ſimilar or neighbour quality: As well may a lady,

virgin

virgin or matron, of immaculate honour, preſume to pity or palliate the ſoft failing of ſome unguarded friend, and thereby confeſs, as it were, thoſe ſympathetic feelings which it behoves her to conceal under the moſt contemptuous diſdain; a diſdain, always proportioned, I believe, to a certain conſciouſneſs which we muſt not explain. I am afraid that poor *Falſtaff* has ſuffered not a little, and may yet ſuffer by this faſtidiouſneſs of temper. But though we may find theſe claſſes of men rather unfavourable to our wiſhes, the Ladies, one may hope, whoſe ſmiles are moſt worth our ambition, may be found more propitious; yet they too, through a generous conformity to the *brave*, are apt to take up the high tone of honour. Heroiſm is an idea perfectly conformable to the natural delicacy and elevation of their minds. Should we be fortunate enough therefore to redeem *Falſtaff* from the imputations of Cowardice, yet plain Courage, I am afraid, will not ſerve the turn: Even their heroes, I think, muſt be for the moſt part in the bloom

bloom of youth, or *juſt where youth ends, in manhood's freſheſt prime*; but to be "*Old, cold, and of* "*intolerable entrails*; *to be fat and greaſy*; *as poor* "*as Job, and as ſlanderous as Satan*;"—Take him away, he merits not a fair trial; he is too offenſive to be turned, too odious to be touched. I grant, indeed that the ſubject of our lecture is not without his infirmity; "*He cuts three in-*"*ches on the ribs, he was ſhort-winded*," and his breath poſſibly not of the ſweeteſt: "*He had the* "*gout*," or ſomething worſe, "*which played the* "*rogue with his great toe.*"—But theſe conſiderations are not to the point; we ſhall conceal, as much as may be, theſe offences; our buſineſs is with his *heart* only, which, as we ſhall endeavour to demonſtrate, lies in the right place, and is firm and ſound, notwithſtanding a few indications to the contrary.—As for you, *Mrs.* MONTAGUE, I am grieved to find that *you* have been involved in a Popular error; ſo much you muſt allow me to ſay;—for the reſt, I bow to your genius and your virtues: You have given to the

world

world a very elegant compoſition; and I am told your manners and your mind are yet more pure, more elegant than your book. *Falſtaff* was too groſs, too infirm, for your inſpection; but if you durſt have looked nearer, you would not have found Cowardice in the number of his infirmities.—We will try if we cannot redeem him from this univerſal cenſure.—Let the venal corporation of authors duck *to the golden fool*, let them ſhape their ſordid quills to the mercenary ends of unmerited praiſe, or of baſer detraction;—*old Jack* though deſerted by princes, though cenſured by an ungrateful world, and perſecuted from age to age by Critic and Commentator, and though never rich enough to hire one literary proſtitute, ſhall find a Voluntary defender; and that too at a time when the whole body of the *Nabobry* demands and requires defence; whilſt their ill-gotten and almoſt untold gold feels looſe in their unaſſured graſp, and whilſt they are ready to ſhake off portions of the enormous heap, that they may the more ſecurely

ſecurely claſp the remainder.—But not to digreſs without end,—to the candid, to the chearful, to the elegant reader we appeal; our exerciſe is much too light for the four eye of ſtrict ſeverity; it profeſſes amuſement only, but we hope of a kind more rational than the Hiſtory of Miſs *Betſy*, eked out with the Story of Miſs *Lucy*, and the Tale of Mr. *Twankum*: And ſo, in a leiſure hour, and with the good natured reader, it may be hoped, to friend, we return, with an air as buſy and important as if we were engaged in the grave office of meaſuring the *Pyramids*, or ſettling the antiquity of *Stonehenge*, to converſe with this jovial, this fat, this roguiſh, this frail, but, I think, *not cowardly* companion.

Though the robbery at *Gads-Hill*, and the ſuppoſed Cowardice of *Falſtaff* on that occaſion, are next to be conſidered, yet I muſt previouſly declare, that I think the diſcuſſion of this matter to be *now* uneſſential to the

re-eſtabliſhment of *Falſtaff*'s reputation as a man of Courage. For ſuppoſe we ſhould grant, in form, that *Falſtaff* was ſurprized with fear in this ſingle inſtance, that he was off his guard, and even acted like a Coward; what will follow, but that *Falſtaff*, like greater heroes, had his weak moment, and was not exempted from panic and ſurprize? If a ſingle exception can deſtroy a general character, *Hector* was a *Coward*, and *Anthony* a *Poltroon*. But for theſe ſeeming contradictions of Character we ſhall ſeldom be at a loſs to account, if we carefully refer to circumſtance and ſituation.—In the preſent inſtance, *Falſtaff* had done an illegal act; the exertion was over; and he had unbent his mind in ſecurity. The ſpirit of enterprize, and the animating principle of hope, were withdrawn:—In this ſituation, he is unexpectedly attacked; he has no time to recall his thoughts, or bend his mind to action. He is not now acting in the Profeſſion and in the Habits of a Soldier;

Soldier; he is aſſociated with known Cowards; his aſſailants are vigorous, ſudden, and bold; he is conſcious of guilt; he has dangers to dread of every form, preſent and future; priſons and gibbets, as well as ſword and fire; he is ſurrounded with darkneſs, and the Sheriff, the Hangman, and the whole *Poſſe Commitatus* may be at his heels:—Without a moment for reflection, is it wonderful that, under theſe circumſtances, "*he ſhould run and roar, and* "*carry his guts away with as much dexterity as* "*poſſible?*"

But though I might well reſt the queſtion on this ground, yet as there remains many good topics of vindication; and as I think a more minute inquiry into this matter will only bring out more evidence in ſupport of *Falſtaff*'s conſtitutional Courage, I will not decline the diſcuſſion. I beg permiſſion therefore to ſtate fully, as well as fairly, the

whole of this obnoxious tranſaction, this unfortunate robbery at *Gads-Hill.*

In the ſcene wherein we become firſt acquainted with *Falſtaff*, his character is opened in a manner worthy of *Shakeſpeare*: We ſee him in a green old age, mellow, frank, gay, eaſy, corpulent, looſe, unprincipled, and luxurious; a *Robber*, as he ſays, *by his vocation*; yet not altogether ſo:—There was much, it ſeems, of mirth and *recreation* in the caſe: "*The poor abuſes of the times*," he wantonly and humouroufly tells the Prince "*want countenance*; *and he hates to ſee reſolution fobbed off, as it is, by the ruſty curb of old father antic, the law.*"—When he quits the ſcene, we are acquainted that he is only paſſing to the Tavern: "*Farewell*," ſays he, with an air of careleſs jollity and gay content, "*You will find me in Eaſt-Cheap.*" "*Fare-*" "*well*," ſays the Prince, "*thou latter ſpring*; "*farewell, all hallown ſummer.*" But though all this is excellent for *Shakeſpeare*'s purpoſes, we find

find, as yet at leaſt, no hint of *Falſtaff*'s Cowardice, no appearance of Braggadocio, or any preparation whatever for laughter under this head.—The inſtant *Falſtaff* is withdrawn, *Poins* opens to the *Prince* his meditated ſcheme of a double robbery; and here then we may reaſonably expect to be let into theſe parts of *Falſtaff*'s character.—We ſhall ſee.

Poins. *Now my good ſweet lord, ride with us to-*
"*morrow*; *I have a jeſt to execute that I cannot*
"*manage alone.* Falſtaff, Bardolph, Peto, *and*
"Gadſhill *ſhall rob thoſe men that we have already*
"*waylaid*; *yourſelf and I will not be there*; *and*
"*when they have the booty, if you and I do not*
"*rob them, cut this head from off my ſhoulders.*"

This is giving ſtrong ſurety for his words; perhaps he thought the caſe required it: *But* "*how*, ſays the Prince, *ſhall we part with them in* "*ſetting forth?*" *Poins* is ready with his anſwer; he had matured the thought, and could ſolve

every difficulty :—" *They could ſet out before, or* " *after* ; *their horſes might be tied in the wood* ; " *they could change their viſors* ; *and he had al-* " *ready procured caſes of* buckram *to inmaſk their* " *outward garments.*" This was going far ; it was doing buſineſs in good earneſt. But if we look into the Play we ſhall be better able to account for this activity ; we ſhall find that there was, at leaſt as much malice as jeſt in *Poins*'s intention. The rival ſituations of *Poins* and *Falſtaff* had produced on both ſides much jealouſy and ill will, which occaſionally appears, in *Shakeſpeare*'s manner, by ſide lights, without confounding the main action ; and by the little we ſee of this *Poins*, he appears to be an unamiable, if not a very brutiſh and bad, character.—But to paſs this ;—the Prince next ſays, with a deliberate and wholeſome caution, " *I doubt they will be too hard for us.*" *Poins*'s reply is remarkable ; " *Well, for* two *of them, I know* " *them to be as true bred Cowards as ever turned back* ; " *and for the* third, *if he fights longer than he* " *ſees*

"*ſees cauſe, I will forſwear arms.*" There is in this reply a great deal of management: There were *four* perſons in all, as *Poins* well knew, and he had himſelf, but a little before, named them,—*Falſtaff*, *Bardolph*, *Peto*, and *Gadſhill*; but now he omits one of the number, which muſt be either *Falſtaff*, as not ſubject to any imputation in point of Courage; and in that caſe *Peto* will be the *third*;—or, as I rather think, in order to diminiſh the force of the Prince's objection, he artfully drops *Gadſhill*, who was then out of town, and might therefore be ſuppoſed to be leſs in the Prince's notice; and upon this ſuppoſition *Falſtaff* will be the *third*, *who will not fight longer than he ſees reaſon.* But on either ſuppoſition, what evidence is there of a pre-ſuppoſed Cowardice in *Falſtaff*? On the contrary, what ſtronger evidence can we require that the Courage of *Falſtaff* had to this hour, through various trials, ſtood wholly unimpeached, than that *Poins*, the ill-diſpoſed *Poins*,

who ventures, for his own purpoſes, to ſteal, as it were, *one* of the *four* from the notice and memory of the Prince, and who ſhews himſelf, from worſe motives, as ſkilfull in *diminiſhing* as *Falſtaff* appears afterwards to be in *increaſing* of numbers, than that this very *Poins* ſhould not venture to put down *Falſtaff* in the liſt of Cowards; though the occaſion ſo ſtrongly required that he ſhould be degraded. What *Poins* dares do however in this ſort, he *does*. "*As to the third*," for ſo he deſcribes *Falſtaff*, (as if the name of this Veteran would have excited too ſtrongly the ideas of Courage and reſiſtance) "*if he fights longer than he ſees reaſon* "*I will forſwear arms.*" This is the old trick of cautious and artful malice: The turn of expreſſion, or the tone of voice does all; for as to the words themſelves, ſimply conſidered, they might be now truly ſpoken of almoſt any man who ever lived, except the iron-headed hero of *Sweden*.—But *Poins* however adds ſomething, which may appear more

deciſive

deciſive; "*The virtue of this jeſt will be, the* "*incomprehenſible lyes which this fat rogue will* "*tell when we meet at ſupper; how thirty at* "*leaſt he fought with; and what wards, what* "*blows, what extremities, he endured: And in the* "*reproof of this lies the jeſt:*"—Yes, and the *malice* too.—This prediction was unfortunately fulfilled, even beyond the letter of it; a completion more incident, perhaps, to the predictions of malice than of affection. But we ſhall preſently ſee how far either the prediction, or the event, will go to the impeachment of *Falſtaff*'s Courage.—The Prince, who is never duped, comprehends the whole of *Poins*'s views. But let that paſs.

In the next ſcene we behold all the parties at *Gads-Hill* in preparation for the robbery. Let us carefully examine if it contains any intimation of Cowardice in *Falſtaff*. He is ſhewn under a very ridiculous vexation about his horſe, which is hid from him; but this is nothing

thing to the purpoſe, or only proves that *Falſtaff* knew no terror equal to that of walking *eight yards of uneven ground.* But on occaſion of *Gadſhill*'s being aſked concerning the number of the travellers, and having reported that they were eight or ten, *Falſtaff* exclaims, "*Zounds!* "*will they not rob us!*" If he had ſaid more ſeriouſly, "*I doubt they will be too hard for us,*"—he would then have only uſed the Prince's own words upon a leſs alarming occaſion. This cannot need defence. But the Prince, in his uſual ſtile of mirth, replies, "*What a* "*Coward, Sir John Paunch!*" To this one would naturally expect from *Falſtaff* ſome light anſwer; but we are ſurprized with a very ſerious one;—"*I am not indeed* John of Gaunt *your* "*grandfather, but yet no* Coward, Hal." This is ſingular: It contains, I think, the true character of *Falſtaff*; and it ſeems to be thrown out *here*, at a very critical conjuncture, as a caution to the audience not to take too ſadly what was intended only (to uſe the Prince's words)

words,) "*as argument for a week, laughter for "a month, and a good jeſt for ever after.*" The whole of *Falſtaff*'s paſt life could not, it ſhould ſeem, furniſh the Prince with a reply, and he is, therefore, obliged to draw upon the coming hope. "*Well*, (ſays he, *myſteriouſly*,) "*let the event try*;" meaning the event of the concerted attack on *Falſtaff*; an event ſo probable, that he might indeed venture to rely on it.—But the travellers approach: The Prince haſtily propoſes a diviſion of ſtrength; that he with *Poins* ſhould take a ſtation ſeperate from the reſt, ſo that if the travellers ſhould eſcape one party, they might light on the other: *Falſtaff* does not object, though he ſuppoſes the travellers to be eight or ten in number. We next ſee *Falſtaff* attack theſe travellers with alacrity uſing the accuſtomed words of threat and terror;—they make no reſiſtance, and he binds and robs them.

Hitherto

Hitherto I think there has not appeared the leaſt *trait* either of boaſt or fear in *Falſtaff*. But now comes on the concerted tranſaction, which has been the ſource of ſo much diſhonour. *As they are ſharing the booty*, (ſays the ſtage direction) *the Prince and* Poins *ſet upon them, they all run away*; *and* Falſtaff *after a blow or two runs away too, leaving the booty behind them.*—"*Got with much eaſe*:" ſays the Prince, as an event beyond expectation, "*Now mer-*"*rily to horſe.*"—Poins adds, as they are going off, "*How the rogue roared!*" This obſervation is afterwards remembered by the Prince, who urging the jeſt to *Falſtaff*, ſays, doubtleſs with all the licence of exaggeration,—"*And you* Falſtaff, "*carried your guts away as nimbly, with as quick* "*dexterity, and roared for mercy, and ſtill ran* "*and roared, as I ever heard bull-calf.*" If he did roar for mercy, it muſt have been a very inarticulate ſort of roaring; for there is not a ſingle word ſet down for *Falſtaff* from which this roaring may be inferred, or any ſtage direction

rection to the actor for that purpoſe: But, in the ſpirit of mirth and deriſion, the lighteſt exclamation might be eaſily converted into the roar of a bull-calf.

We have now gone through this tranſaction conſidered ſimply on its own circumſtances, and without reference to any future boaſt or imputation. It is upon theſe circumſtances the caſe muſt be tried, and every colour ſubſequently thrown on it, either by wit or folly, ought to be diſcharged. Take it, then, as it ſtands hitherto, with reference only to its own preceding and concomitant circumſtances, and to the unbounded ability of *Shakeſpeare* to obtain his own ends, and we muſt, I think, be compelled to confeſs that this tranſaction was never intended by *Shakeſpeare* to detect and expoſe the falſe pretences of a real Coward; but, on the contrary, to involve a man of allowed Courage, though in other reſpects of a very peculiar character, in ſuch circumſtances and

ſuſpicions

ſuſpicions of Cowardice as might, by the operation of thoſe peculiarities, produce afterwards much temporary mirth among his familiar and intimate companions: Of this we cannot require a ſtronger proof than the great attention which is paid to the decorum and truth of character in the ſtage direction already quoted: It appears, from thence, that it was not thought *decent* that *Falſtaff* ſhould run at all, until he had been deſerted by his companions, and had even afterwards exchanged blows with his aſſailants;—and thus, a juſt diſtinction is kept up between the natural Cowardice of the three aſſociates and the accidental Terror of *Falſtaff*.

Hitherto, then, I think it is very clear that no laughter either is, or is intended to be, raiſed upon the ſcore of *Falſtaff*'s Cowardice. For after all, it is not ſingularly ridiculous that an old inactive man of no boaſt, as far as appears, or extraordinary pretenſions

tenſions to valour, ſhould endeavour to ſave himſelf by flight from the aſſault of two bold and vigorous aſſailants. The very Players, who are, I think, the very worſt judges of *Shakeſpeare*, have been made ſenſible, I ſuppoſe from long experience, that there is nothing in this tranſaction to excite any extraordinary laughter; but this they take to be a defect in the management of their author, and therefore I imagine it is, that they hold themſelves obliged to ſupply the vacancy, and fill it up with ſome low buffoonery of their own. Inſtead of the diſpatch neceſſary on this occaſion, they bring *Falſtaff*, *ſtuffing and all*, to the very front of the ſtage; where with much mummery and grimace, he ſeats himſelf down, with a canvaſs money-bag in his hand, to divide the ſpoil. In this ſituation he is attacked by the *Prince* and *Poins*, whoſe tin ſwords hang idly in the air and delay to ſtrike till the *Player Falſtaff*, who ſeems more troubled with flatulence than fear, is able to riſe; which

which is not till after ſome ineffectual efforts, and with the aſſiſtance, (to the beſt of my memory) of one of the thieves, who lingers behind, in ſpite of terror, for this friendly purpoſe; after which, without any reſiſtance on his part, he is goaded off the ſtage like a fat ox for ſlaughter by theſe *ſtony-hearted* drivers in *buckram*. I think he does not *roar*;—perhaps the player had never perfected himſelf in the tones of a bull-calf. This whole tranſaction ſhould be ſhewn between the interſtices of a back ſcene: The leſs we ſee in ſuch caſes, the better we conceive. Something of reſiſtance and afterwards of celerity in flight we ſhould be made witneſſes of; the *roar* we ſhould take on the credit of *Poins*. Nor is there any occaſion for all that bolſtering with which they fill up the figure of *Falſtaff*; they do not diſtinguiſh betwixt humourous exaggeration and neceſſary truth. The Prince is called *ſtarveling*, *dried neat's tongue*, *ſtock fiſh*, and other names of the ſame nature. They might with

with almoſt as good reaſon, ſearch the glaſs-houſes for ſome exhauſted ſtoker to furniſh out a Prince of *Wales* of ſufficient correſpondence to this picture.

We next come to the ſcene of *Falſtaff*'s braggadocioes. I have already wandered too much into details; yet I muſt, however, bring *Falſtaff* forward to this laſt ſcene of trial in all his proper colouring and proportions. The progreſſive diſcovery of *Falſtaff*'s character is excellently managed.—In the firſt ſcene we become acquainted with his figure, which we muſt in ſome degree conſider as a part of his character; we hear of his gluttony and his debaucheries, and become witneſſes of that indiſtinguiſhable mixture of humour and licentiouſneſs which runs through his whole character; but what we are principally ſtruck with, is the eaſe of his manners and deportment, and the unaffected freedom and wonderful pregnancy of his wit and humour. We ſee him, in the next ſcene, agi-

tated with vexation: His horſe is concealed from him, and he gives on this occaſion ſo ſtriking a deſcription of his diſtreſs, and his words ſo labour and are ſo loaded with heat and vapour, that, but for laughing, we ſhould pity him; laugh, however, we muſt at the extreme incongruity of a man at once corpulent and old, aſſociating with youth in an enterprize demanding the utmoſt extravagance of ſpirit, and all the wildneſs of activity: And this it is which makes his complaints ſo truly ridiculous. "*Give me my horſe!*" ſays he, in another ſpirit than that of *Richard*; "*Eight* "*yards of uneven ground*," adds this *Forreſter of Diana*, this *enterprizing gentleman of the ſhade*, "*is threeſcore and ten miles* a-foot *with me.*"— In the heat and agitation of the robbery, out comes more and more extravagant inſtances of incongruity. Though he is moſt probably older and much fatter than either of the travellers, yet he calls them, *Bacons*, *Bacon-fed*, *and gorbellied knaves:* "*Hang them*, (ſays he) *fat chuffs*, "*they*

"*they hate us youth: What! young men, muſt*
"*live:—You are grand Jurors, are ye? We'll jure*
"*ye, i' faith.*" But, as yet, we do not ſee the whole length and breadth of him: This is reſerved for the braggadocio ſcene. We expect entertainment, but we don't well know of what kind. *Poins*, by his prediction, has given us a hint: But we do not ſee or feel *Falſtaff* to be a Coward, much leſs a boaſter; without which even Cowardice is not ſufficiently ridiculous; and therefore it is, that on the ſtage, we find them always connected. In this uncertainty on our part, he is, with much artful preparation, produced.—His entrance is delayed to ſtimulate our expectation; and, at laſt, to take off the dullneſs of anticipation, and to add ſurprize to pleaſure, he is called in, as if for another purpoſe of mirth than what we are furniſhed with: We now behold him, fluctuating with fiction, and labouring with diſſembled paſſion and chagrin: Too full for utterance, *Poins* provokes him by a few ſim-

ple words, containing a fine contraſt of affected eaſe. "*Welcome* Jack, *where haſt thou* "*been?*" But when we hear him burſt forth, "*A plague on all Cowards! Give me a cup of ſack.* "*Is there no virtue extant!*"—We are at once in poſſeſſion of the whole man, and are ready to hug him, guts, lyes and all, as an inexhauſtible fund of pleaſantry and humour. *Cowardice*, I apprehend, is out of our thought; it does not, I think, mingle in our mirth. As to this point, I have preſumed to ſay already, and I repeat it, that we are, in my opinion, the dupes of our own wiſdom, of ſyſtematic reaſoning, of ſecond thought, and after reflection. The firſt ſpectators, I believe, thought of nothing but the laughable ſcrape which ſo ſingular a character was falling into, and were delighted to ſee a humourous and unprincipled wit ſo happily taken in his own inventions, precluded from all rational defence, and driven to the neceſſity of crying out, after

ter a few ludicrous evaſions, "*No more of that*, "Hal, *if thou lov'ſt me*."

I do not conceive myſelf obliged to enter into a conſideration of *Falſtaff*'s lyes concerning the tranſaction at *Gad's-hill*. I have conſidered his conduct as independent of thoſe lyes; I have examined the whole of it apart, and found it free of Cowardice or fear, except in one inſtance, which I have endeavoured to account for and excuſe. I have therefore a right to infer that thoſe lyes are to be derived, not from Cowardice, but from ſome other part of his character, which it does not concern me to examine: But I have not contented myſelf hitherto with this ſort of negative defence; and the reader I believe is aware that I am reſolute (though I confeſs not untired) to carry this fat rogue out of the reach of every imputation which affects, or may ſeem to affect, his natural Courage.

The firſt obſervation then which ſtrikes us, as to his braggadocioes, is, that they are braggadocioes *after the fact*. In other caſes we ſee the Coward of the Play bluſter and boaſt for a time, talk of diſtant wars, and private duels, out of the reach of knowledge and of evidence; of ſtorms and ſtratagems, and of falling in upon the enemy pell-mell and putting thouſands to the ſword; till, at length, on the proof of ſome preſent and apparent fact, he is brought to open and *laſting* ſhame; to ſhame I mean as a *Coward*; for as to what there is of *lyar* in the caſe, it is conſidered only as acceſſory and ſcarcely reckoned into the account of diſhonour.—But in the inſtance before us, every thing is reverſed: The Play opens with the *Fact*; a Fact, from its circumſtances as well as from the age and inactivity of the man, very excuſable and capable of much apology, if not of defence. This Fact is preceded by no bluſter or pretence whatever;—the lies and braggadocioes follow; but they

they are not *general*; they are confined, and have reference to this one Fact only; the detection is *immediate*; and after ſome accompanying mirth and laughter, the ſhame of that detection ends; it has no *duration*, as in other caſes; and, for the reſt of the Play, the character ſtands juſt where it did before *without any puniſhment or degradation whatever.*

To account for all this, let us only ſuppoſe that *Falſtaff* was a man of natural Courage, though in all reſpects unprincipled; but that he was ſurprized in one ſingle inſtance into an act of real terror; which, inſtead of excuſing upon circumſtances, he endeavours to cover by lyes and braggadocio; and that theſe lyes become thereupon the ſubject, in this place, of detection. Upon theſe ſuppoſitions the whole difficulty will vaniſh at once, and every thing be natural, common, and plain. The *Fact* itſelf will be of courſe *excuſable*; that is, it will ariſe out of a combination of ſuch circum-

ſtances, as being applicable to one caſe only, will not deſtroy the general character: It will not be *preceded* by any braggadocio, containing any fair indication of Cowardice; as real Cowardice is not ſuppoſed to exiſt in the character. But the firſt act of real or apparent Cowardice would naturally throw a vain unprincipled man into the uſe of lyes and braggadocio; but theſe would have reference only to the *Fact in queſtion*, and not apply to other caſes or infect his general character, which is not ſuppoſed to ſtand in need of impoſition. Again,—the detection of Cowardice as ſuch, is more diverting after a long and various courſe of Pretence, where the lye of character is preſerved, as it were, whole, and brought into ſufficient magnitude for a burſt of diſcovery; yet, mere occaſional lyes, ſuch as *Falſtaff* is hereby ſuppoſed to utter, are, for the purpoſe of ſport, beſt detected in the telling; becauſe, indeed, they cannot be preſerved for a future time; the exigence and the humour

humour will be paſt: But the *ſhame* ariſing to *Falſtaff* from the detection of *mere lyes* would be *temporary only*; his character as to this point, being already known, and *tolerated for the humour*. Nothing, therefore, could follow but mirth and laughter, and the temporary triumph of baffling a wit at his own weapons, and reducing him to an abſolute ſurrender: After which, we ought not to be ſurprized if we ſee him riſe again, like a boy from play, and run another race with as little diſhonour as before.

What then can we ſay, but that it is clearly the lyes only, not the *Cowardice* of *Falſtaff* which are here detected: *Lyes*, to which what there may be of Cowardice is incidental only, improving indeed the Jeſt, but by no means the real Buſineſs of the ſcene.—And now alſo we may more clearly diſcern the true force and meaning of *Poins*'s prediction. "*The Jeſt* "*will be*, ſays he, *the incomprehenſible Lyes that* "*this*

"*this fat rogue will tell us: How thirty at*
"*leaſt he fought with:—and in the reproof of*
"*this lyes the jeſt*;" That is, in the detection of theſe lyes *ſimply*; for as to *Courage*, he had never ventured to inſinuate more than that *Falſtaff* would not fight longer than he ſaw cauſe: *Poins* was in expectation indeed that *Falſtaff* would fall into ſome diſhonour on this occaſion; an event highly probable: But this was not, it ſeems, to be the principal ground of their mirth, but the detection of thoſe *incomprehenſible lyes*, which he boldly predicts, upon his knowledge of *Falſtaff*'s character, this *fat rogue*, not *Coward*, would tell them. This prediction therefore, and the completion of it, go only to the impeachment of *Falſtaff*'s *veracity* and not of his *Courage*. *Theſe*
"*lyes*, ſays the Prince, *are like the father of*
"*them, groſs as a mountain, open, palpable.—*
"*Why thou clay-brained gutts, thou knotty pa-*
"*ted fool*; *how couldſt thou know theſe men in Ken-*
dal

"*dal Green, when it was ſo dark thou couldſt*
"*not ſee thy hand? Come tell us your reaſon.*"

"Poins. *Come your reaſon*, Jack, *your reaſon.*"

"Again, ſays the Prince, *Hear how a plain*
"*Tale ſhall put you down—What trick, what de-*
"*vice, what ſtarting hole canſt thou now find*
"*out to hide thee from this open and apparent*
"*ſhame?*"

"Poins. *Come let's hear*, Jack, *what trick*
haſt thou now?"

All this clearly refers to *Falſtaff*'s lyes only *as ſuch*; and the objection ſeems to be, that he had not told them well, and with ſufficient ſkill and probability. Indeed nothing ſeems to have been required of *Falſtaff* at any period of time but a good evaſion. The truth is, that there is ſo much mirth, and ſo little of malice or impoſition, in his fictions, that they may

may for the moſt part be conſidered as mere ſtrains of humour and exerciſes of wit, impeachable only for defect, when that happens, of the quality from which they are principally derived. Upon this occaſion *Falſtaff*'s evaſions fail him; he is at the end of his invention; and it ſeems fair that in defect of wit, the law ſhould paſs upon him, and that he ſhould undergo the temporary cenſure of that Cowardice which he could not paſs off by any evaſion whatever. The beſt he could think of, was *inſtinct*: He was indeed a *Coward upon inſtinct*; in that reſpect *like a valiant lion, who would not touch the true Prince.* It would have been a vain attempt, the reader will eaſily perceive, in *Falſtaff*, to have gone upon other ground, and to have aimed at juſtifying his Courage by a ſerious vindication: This would have been to have miſtaken the true point of argument: It was his *lyes*, not his *Courage*, which was really in queſtion. There was beſides no getting out of the toils

in

in which he had entangled himſelf: If he was not, he ought at leaſt, by his own ſhewing, to have *been at half-ſword with a dozen of them two hours together*; whereas, it unfortunately appears, and that too evidently to be evaded, that he had run with ſingular celerity from *two*, after the exchange of *a few blows* only. This precluded *Falſtaff* from all rational defence in his own perſon;—but it has not precluded me, who am not the advocate of his *lyes* but of his *Courage*.

But there are other ſingularities in *Falſtaff*'s lyes, which go more directly to his vindication.—That they are confined to one ſcene and one occaſion only, we are not *now* at a loſs to account for;—but what ſhall we ſay to their extravagance? The lyes of *Parolles* and *Bobadill* are brought into ſome ſhape; but the fictions of *Falſtaff* are ſo prepoſterous and *incomprehenſible*, that one may fairly doubt if they ever were intended for credit; and

therefore

therefore, if they ought to be called *lyes*, and not rather *humour*; or, to compound the matter, *humourous rhodomontades*. Certain it is, that they deſtroy their own purpoſe and are clearly not the effect, in this reſpect, of a regulated practice, and habit of impoſition. The real truth ſeems to be, that had *Falſtaff*, looſe and unprincipled as he is, been born a Coward and bred a Soldier, he muſt, naturally, have been a great *Braggadocio*, a true *miles glorioſus*: But in ſuch caſe he ſhould have been exhibited active and young; for it is plain, that age and corpulency are an excuſe for Cowardice, which ought not to be afforded him. In the preſent caſe, wherein he was not only involved in ſuſpicious circumſtances, but wherein he ſeems to have felt ſome conſcious touch of infirmity, and having no candid conſtruction to expect from his laughing companions, he burſts at once, and with all his might, into the moſt unweighed and prepoſterous fictions, determined to put to proof

on

on this occaſion his boaſted talent of *ſwearing truth out of England*. He tried it here, to its utmoſt extent, and was unfortunately routed on his own ground; which indeed, with ſuch a mine beneath his feet, could not be otherwiſe. But without this, he had mingled in his deceits ſo much whimſical humour and fantaſtic exaggeration that he muſt have been detected; and herein appears the admirable addreſs of *Shakeſpeare*, who can ſhew us *Falſtaff* in the various light, not only of what he is, but what he would have been under one ſingle variation of character,—the want of natural Courage; whilſt with an art not enough underſtood, he moſt effectually preſerves the real character of *Falſtaff* even in the moment he ſeems to depart from it, by making his lyes too extravagant for practiſed impoſition; by grounding them more upon humour than deceit; and turning them, as we ſhall next ſee, into a fair and honeſt proof of general Courage, by appropriating them to the concealment

ment only of a ſingle exception. And hence it is, that we ſee him draw ſo deeply and ſo confidently upon his former credit for Courage and atchievment: "*I never dealt better in* "*my life,—thou know'ſt my old ward, Hal*;" are expreſſions, which clearly refer to ſome known feats and defences of his former life. His exclamations againſt Cowardice, his reference to his own manhood, "*Die when* "*thou wilt old* Jack, *if manhood, good man-* "*hood, be not forgot upon the face of the earth,* "*then am I a ſhotten herring:*" Theſe, and various expreſſions ſuch as theſe, would be abſurdities not impoſitions, Farce not Comedy, if not calculated to conceal ſome defect ſuppoſed unknown to the hearers; and theſe hearers were, in the preſent caſe, his conſtant companions, and the daily witneſſes of his conduct. If before this period he had been a known and detected Coward, and was conſcious that he had no credit to loſe, I ſee no reaſon why he ſhould fly ſo violently from a familiar

familiar ignominy which had often before attached him; or why falſhoods, ſeemingly in ſuch a caſe, neither calculated for or expecting credit, ſhould be cenſured, or detected, as lyes or impoſition.

That the whole tranſaction was conſidered as a mere jeſt, and as carrying with it no ſerious imputation on the Courage of *Falſtaff* is manifeſt, not only from his being allowed, when the laugh was paſt, to call himſelf, without contradiction in the perſonated character of *Hal* himſelf, "valiant *Jack Falſtaff*, *and* "*the more* valiant *being*, *as he is*, old Jack Falſtaff," but from various other particulars, and, above all, from the declaration, which the Prince makes on that very night of his intention of procuring this *fat rogue a Charge of foot*;—a circumſtance, doubtleſs, contrived by *Shakeſpeare* to wipe off the ſeeming diſhonour of the day: And from this time forward, we hear of no imputation ariſing from this tranſaction; it is

born and dies in a convivial hour; it leaves no trace behind, nor do we ſee any longer in the character of *Falſtaff* the boaſting or braggadocio of a Coward.

Tho' I have conſidered *Falſtaff*'s character as relative only to one ſingle quality, yet ſo much has been ſaid, that it cannot eſcape the reader's notice that he is a character made up by *Shakeſpeare* wholly of incongruities ;—a man at once young and old, enterprizing and fat, a dupe and a wit, harmleſs and wicked, weak in principle and reſolute by conſtitution, cowardly in appearance and brave in reality; a knave without malice, a lyar without deceit ; and a knight, a gentleman, and a ſoldier, without either dignity, decency, or honour : This is a character, which, though it may be decompounded, could not, I believe, have been formed, nor the ingredients of it duly mingled upon any receipt whatever : It required the hand of *Shakeſpeare* himſelf to give to every particular

particular part a reliſh of the whole, and of the whole to every particular part ;—alike the ſame incongruous, identical *Falſtaff*, whether to the grave Chief Juſtice he vainly talks of his youth, and offers to *caper for a thouſand*; or cries to Mrs. *Doll*, "*I am old, I am old*," though ſhe is ſeated on his lap, and he is courting her for buſſes. How *Shakeſpeare* could furniſh out ſentiment of ſo extraordinary a compoſition, and ſupply it with ſuch appropriated and characteriſtic language, humour and wit, I cannot tell; but I may, however, venture to infer, and that confidently, that he who ſo well underſtood the uſes of incongruity, and that laughter was to be raiſed by the oppoſition of qualities in the ſame man, and not by their agreement or conformity, would never have attempted to raiſe mirth by ſhewing us Cowardice in a Coward unattended by Pretence, and ſoftened by every excuſe of age, corpulence, and infirmity: And of this we cannot have a more ſtriking proof than his furniſh-

ing this very character, on one inſtance of real terror, however excuſable, with boaſt, braggadocio, and pretence, exceeding that of all other ſtage Cowards the whole length of his ſuperior wit, humour, and invention.

What then upon the whole ſhall be ſaid but that *Shakeſpeare* has made certain Impreſſions, or produced certain effects, of which he has thought fit to conceal or obſcure the cauſe? How he has done this, and for what ſpecial ends, we ſhall now preſume to gueſs.— Before the period in which *Shakeſpeare* wrote, the fools and Zanys of the ſtage were drawn out of the coarſeſt and cheapeſt materials: Some eſſential folly, with a daſh of knave and coxcomb, did the feat. But *Shakeſpeare*, who delighted in difficulties, was reſolved to furniſh a richer repaſt, and to give to one eminent buffoon the high reliſh of wit, humour, birth, dignity, and Courage. But this was a proceſs which required the niceſt hand, and the utmoſt

moſt management and addreſs: Theſe enumerated qualities are, in their own nature, productive of *reſpect*; an Impreſſion the moſt oppoſite to laughter that can be. This Impreſſion then, it was, at all adventures, neceſſary to with-hold; which could not perhaps well be without dreſſing up theſe qualities in fantaſtic forms, and colours not their own; and thereby cheating the eye with ſhews of baſeneſs and of folly, whilſt he ſtole as it were upon the palate a richer and a fuller *goût*. To this end, what arts, what contrivances, has he not practiſed! How has he ſteeped this ſingular character in bad habits for fifty years together, and brought him forth ſaturated with every folly and with every vice not deſtructive of his eſſential character, or incompatible with his own primary deſign! For this end, he has deprived *Falſtaff* of every good principle; and for another, which will be preſently mentioned, he has concealed every bad one. He has given him alſo every infirmity of body

that is not likely to awaken our compaſſion, and which is moſt proper to render both his better qualities and his vices ridiculous: He has aſſociated levity and debauch with *age*, corpulence and inactivity with *courage*, and has roguiſhly coupled the gout with *Military honours*, and a *penſion* with the *pox*. He has likewiſe involved this character in ſituations, out of which neither wit or Courage can extricate him with honour. The ſurprize at *Gads-hill* might have betrayed a hero into flight, and the encounter with *Douglas* left him no choice but death or ſtratagem. If he plays an after-game, and endeavours to redeem his ill fortune by lies and braggadocio, his ground fails him; no wit, no evaſion will avail: Or is he likely to appear reſpectable in his perſon, rank, and demeanor, how is that reſpect abated or diſcharged! *Shakeſpeare* has given him a kind of ſtate indeed; but of what is it compoſed? Of that fuſtian cowardly raſcal *Piſtol*, and his yoke-fellow of few words the

equally

equally deedleſs *Nym*; of his cup-bearer the fiery *Trigon*, whoſe zeal burns in his noſe, *Bardolph*; and of the boy, who bears the purſe with *ſeven groats and two-pence* ;—a boy who was given him on purpoſe to ſet him off, and whom he walks *before*, according to his own deſcription, "*like a ſow that had overwhelmed* "*all her litter but one.*"

But it was not enough to render *Falſtaff* ridiculous in his figure, ſituations, and equipage; *ſtill* his reſpectable qualities would have come forth, at leaſt occaſionally, to ſpoil our mirth; or they might have burſt the intervention of ſuch ſlight impediments, and have every where ſhone through: It was neceſſary then to go farther, and throw on him that ſubſtantial ridicule, which only the incongruities of real vice can furniſh; of vice, which was to be ſo mixed and blended with his frame as to give a durable character and colour to the whole.

But it may here be neceſſary to detain the reader a moment in order to apprize him of my further intention; without which, I might hazard that good underſtanding, which I hope has hitherto been preſerved between us.

I have 'till now looked only to the Courage of *Falſtaff*, a quality which having been denied, in terms, to belong to his conſtitution, I have endeavoured to vindicate to the Underſtandings of my readers; the Impreſſion on their Feelings (in which all Dramatic truth conſiſts) being already, as I have ſuppoſed, in favour of the character. In the purſuit of this ſubject I have taken the general Impreſſion of the whole character pretty much, I ſuppoſe, like other men; and, when occaſion has required, have ſo tranſmitted it to the reader; joining in the common Feeling of *Falſtaff*'s pleaſantry, his apparent freedom from ill principle, and his companionable wit and good humour: With a ſtage character, in the article

cle of exhibition, we have nothing more to do; for in fact what is it but an Impreſſion; an appearance, which we are to conſider as a reality; and which we may venture to applaud or condemn as ſuch, without further inquiry or inveſtigation? But if we would account for our Impreſſions, or for certain ſentiments or actions in a character, not derived from its apparent principles, yet appearing, we know not why, natural, we are then compelled to look farther, and examine if there be not ſomething more in the character than is *ſhewn*; ſomething inferred, which is not brought under our ſpecial notice: In ſhort, we muſt look to the art of the writer, and to the principles of human nature, to diſcover the hidden cauſes of ſuch effects.—Now this is a very different matter—The former conſiderations reſpected the Impreſſion only, without regard to the Underſtanding; but this queſtion relates to the Underſtanding alone. It is true that there are but few Dramatic characters which

which will bear this kind of inveſtigation, as not being drawn in exact conformity to thoſe principles of general nature to which we muſt refer. But this is not the caſe with regard to the characters of *Shakeſpeare*; they are ſtruck out *whole*, by ſome happy art which I cannot clearly comprehend, out of the general maſs of things, from the block as it were of nature: And it is, I think, an eaſier thing to give a juſt draught of man from theſe Theatric forms, which I cannot help conſidering as originals, than by drawing from real life, amidſt ſo much intricacy, obliquity, and diſguiſe. If therefore, for further proofs of *Falſtaff*'s Courage, or for the ſake of curious ſpeculation, or for both, I change my poſition, and look to cauſes inſtead of effects, the reader muſt not be ſurprized if he finds the former *Falſtaff* vaniſh like a dream, and another, of more diſguſtful form, preſented to his view; one, whoſe final puniſhment we ſhall be ſo far from regretting, that we ourſelves ſhall be ready to conſign him to a ſeverer doom.

The

The reader will very eaſily apprehend that a character, which we might wholly diſapprove of, conſidered as exiſting in human life, may yet be thrown on the ſtage into certain peculiar ſituations, and be compreſſed by external influences into ſuch temporary appearances, as may render ſuch character for a time highly acceptable and entertaining, and even more diſtinguiſhed for qualities, which on this ſuppoſition would be accidents only, than another character really poſſeſſing thoſe qualities, but which, under the preſſure of the ſame ſituation and influences, would be diſtorted into a different form, or totally loſt in timidity and weakneſs. If therefore the character before us will admit of this kind of inveſtigation, our Inquiry will not be without ſome dignity, conſidered as extending to the principles of human nature, and to the genius and arts of Him, who has beſt caught every various form of the human mind, and tranſmitted them with the greateſt happineſs and fidelity.

To

To return then to the vices of *Falſtaff*.—We have frequently referred to them under the name of ill habits;—but perhaps the reader is not fully aware how very vicious he indeed is;—he is a robber, a glutton, a cheat, a drunkard, and a lyar; laſcivious, vain, inſolent, profligate, and profane:—A fine infuſion this, and ſuch as without very excellent cookery muſt have thrown into the diſh a great deal too much of the *fumet*. It was a nice operation;—theſe vices were not only to be of a particular ſort, but it was alſo neceſſary to guard them at both ends; on the *one*, from all appearance of malicious motive, and indeed from the manifeſtation of any ill principle whatever, which muſt have produced *diſguſt*,—a ſenſation no leſs oppoſite to laughter than is *reſpect*;—and, on the *other*, from the notice, or even apprehenſion, in the ſpectators, of *pernicious effect*; which produces *grief* and *terror*, and is the proper province of Tragedy alone.

Actions

Actions cannot with ſtrict propriety be ſaid to be either virtuous or vicious. Theſe qualities, or attributes, belong to *agents* only; and are derived, even in reſpect to *them*, from intention alone. The abſtracting of qualities, and conſidering them as independent of any *ſubject*, and the applying of them afterwards to actions independent of the agent, is a double operation which I do not pretend, thro' any part of it, to underſtand. All actions may moſt properly, in their own nature, I think, be called *neutral*; tho' in common diſcourſe, and in writing where preciſion is not requiſite, we often term them *vicious*, tranſfering on theſe occaſions the attributive from the *agent* to the *action*; and ſometimes we call them *evil*, or of pernicious effect, by tranſferring, in like manner, the injuries incidentally ariſing from certain actions to the life, happineſs, or intereſt of human beings, to the natural operation, whether moral or phyſical, of the *actions* themſelves: *One* is a colour

thrown

thrown on them by the *intention*, in which I think conſiſts all moral turpitude, and the *other* by effect: If therefore a Dramatic writer will uſe certain managements to keep vicious intention as much as poſſible from our notice, and make us ſenſible that no evil effect follows, he may paſs off actions of very vicious motive, without much ill impreſſion, as mere *incongruities*, and the effect of *humour* only;—*words theſe*, which, as applied to human conduct, are employed, I believe, to cover a great deal of what may deſerve much harder appellation.

The *difference* between ſuffering an evil effect to take place, and of preventing ſuch effect, from actions preciſely of the ſame nature, is ſo great, that it is often *all the difference* between Tragedy and Comedy. The Fine gentleman of the Comic ſcene, who ſo promptly draws his ſword, and wounds, without killing, ſome other gentleman of the

ſame

ſame ſort; and *He* of Tragedy, whoſe ſtabs are mortal, differ very frequently in no other point whatever. If our *Falſtaff* had really *peppered* (as he calls it) *two rogues in buckram ſuits*, we muſt have looked for a very different concluſion, and have expected to have found *Falſtaff*'s Eſſential proſe converted into blank verſe, and to have ſeen him move off, in ſlow and meaſured paces, like the City Prentice to the tolling of a Paſſing bell;—"*he* "*would have become a cart as well as another*, "*or a plague on his bringing up.*"

Every incongruity in a rational being is a ſource of laughter, whether it reſpects manners, ſentiments, conduct, or even dreſs, or ſituation;—but the greateſt of all poſſible incongruity is vice, whether in the intention itſelf, or as transferred to, and becoming more manifeſt in action;—it is inconſiſtent with moral agency, nay, with rationality itſelf, and all the ends and purpoſes of our being.—Our author

deſcribes

deſcribes the natural ridicule of vice in his MEASURE *for* MEASURE in the ſtrongeſt terms, where, after having made the angels weep over the vices of men, he adds, that *with* our ſpleens *they might laugh themſelves quite mortal.* Indeed if we had a perfect diſcernment of the ends of this life only, and could preſerve ourſelves from ſympathy, diſguſt and terror, the vices of mankind would be a ſource of perpetual entertainment. The great difference between *Heraclitus* and *Democritus* lay, it ſeems, in their ſpleen only;—for a wiſe and good man muſt either laugh or cry without ceaſing. Nor indeed is it eaſy to conceive (to inſtance in one caſe only) a more laughable, or a more melancholy object, than a human being, his nature and duration conſidered, earneſtly and anxiouſly exchanging peace of mind and conſcious integrity for gold; and for gold too, which he has often no occaſion for, or dares not employ:—But

Voltaire

Voltaire has by one Publication rendered all *arguments* ſuperfluous: He has told us, in his *Candide*, the merrieſt and moſt diverting tale of frauds, murders, maſſacres, rapes, rapine, deſolation, and deſtruction, that I think it poſſible on any other plan to invent; and he has given us *motive* and *effect*, with every poſſible aggravation, to improve the ſport. One would think it difficult to preſerve the point of ridicule, in ſuch a caſe, unabated by contrary emotions; but now that the feat is performed it appears of eaſy imitation, and I am amazed that our race of imitators have made no efforts in this ſort: It would anſwer I ſhould think in the way of profit, not to mention the moral uſes to which it might be applied. The managements of *Voltaire* conſiſt in this, that he aſſumes a gay, eaſy, and light tone himſelf; that he never excites the reflections of his readers by making any of his own; that he hurries us on with ſuch a rapidity of narration as prevents our

emotions from reſting on any particular point; and to gain this end, he has interwoven the concluſion of one fact ſo into the commencement of another, that we find ourſelves engaged in new matter before we are ſenſible that we had finiſhed the old; he has likewiſe made his crimes ſo enormous, that we do not ſadden on any ſympathy, or find ourſelves partakers in the guilt.—But what is truly ſingular as to this book, is, that it does not appear to have been written for any moral purpoſe, but for That only (if I do not err) of ſatyriſing Providence itſelf; a deſign ſo enormouſly profane, that it may well paſs for the moſt ridiculous part of the whole compoſition.

But if vice, diveſted of diſguſt and terror, is thus in its own nature ridiculous, we ought not to be ſurpriſed if the very ſame vices which ſpread horror and deſolation thro' the Tragic ſcene ſhould yet furniſh the Comic with

with its higheſt laughter and delight, and that tears, and mirth, and even humour and wit itſelf, ſhould grow from the ſame root of incongruity: For what is humour in the humouriſt, but incongruity, whether of ſentiment, conduct, or manners? What in the man of humour, but a quick diſcernment, and keen ſenſibility of theſe incongruities? And what is wit itſelf, without preſuming however to give a complete definition where ſo many have failed, but a talent, for the moſt part, of marking with force and vivacity unexpected points of likeneſs in things ſuppoſed incongruous, and points of incongruity in things ſuppoſed alike: And hence it is that wit and humour, tho' always diſtinguiſhed, are ſo often coupled together; it being very poſſible, I ſuppoſe, to be a man of humour without wit; but I think not a man of wit without humour.

But I have here raiſed ſo much new matter, that the reader may be out of hope of ſee-

ing this argument, any more than the tale of *Triſtram*, brought to a concluſion: He may ſuppoſe me now prepared to turn my pen to a moral, or to a dramatic Eſſay, or ready to draw the line between vice and virtue, or Comedy and Tragedy, as fancy ſhall lead the way;—But he is happily miſtaken; I am preſſing earneſtly, and not without ſome impatience, to a concluſion. The principles I have now opened are neceſſary to be conſidered for the purpoſe of eſtimating the character of *Falſtaff*, conſidered as relatively to human nature: I ſhall then reduce him with all poſſible diſpatch to his Theatric condition, and reſtore him, I hope, without injury, to the ſtage.

There is indeed a vein or two of argument running through the matter that now ſurrounds me, which I might open for my own more peculiar purpoſes; but which, having reſiſted much greater temptations, I ſhall wholly deſert. It ought not, however, to be forgotten,

that

that if *Shakeſpeare* has uſed arts to abate our reſpect of *Falſtaff*, it ſhould follow by juſt inference, that, without ſuch arts, his character would have grown into a *reſpect* inconſiſtent with laughter; and that yet, without Courage, he could not have been reſpectable at all;—that it required nothing leſs than the union of ability and Courage to ſupport his other more accidental qualities with any tolerable coherence. Courage and Ability are firſt principles of Character, and not to be deſtroyed whilſt the united frame of body and mind continues whole and unimpaired; they are the pillars on which he ſtands firm in ſpight of all his vices and diſgraces;—but if we ſhould take Courage away, and reckon Cowardice among his other defects, all the intelligence and wit in the world could not ſupport him through a ſingle Play.

The effect of taking away the influence of this quality upon the manners of a cha-

racter, tho' the quality and the influence be aſſumed only, is evident in the caſes of *Parolles* and *Bobadil*. *Parolles*, at leaſt, did not ſeem to want wit; but both theſe characters are reduced almoſt to non-entity, and after their diſgraces, walk only thro' a ſcene or two, the mere mockery of their former exiſtence. *Parolles* was ſo changed, that neither the *fool*, nor the old lord *Le-feu*, could readily recollect his perſon; and his wit ſeemed to be annihilated with his Courage.

Let it not be here objected that *Falſtaff* is univerſally conſidered as a Coward;—we do indeed call him ſo; but that is nothing, if the character itſelf does not act from any conſciouſneſs of this kind, and if our Feelings take his part, and revolt againſt our underſtanding.

As to the arts by which *Shakeſpeare* has contrived to obſcure the vices of *Falſtaff*, they

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are ſuch, as being ſubſervient only to the mirth of the Play, I do not feel myſelf obliged to detail.

But it may be well worth our curioſity to inquire into the compoſition of *Falſtaff*'s character.—Every man we may obſerve, has two characters; that is, every man may be ſeen externally, and from without;—or a ſection may be made of him, and he may be illuminated from within.

Of the external character of *Falſtaff*, we can ſcarcely be ſaid to have any ſteady view. *Jack Falſtaff* we are familiar with, but *Sir John* was better known, it ſeems, *to the reſt of Europe*, than to his intimate companions; yet we have ſo many glimpſes of him, and he is opened to us occaſionally in ſuch various points of view, that we cannot be miſtaken in deſcribing him as a man of birth and faſhion, bred up in all the learning and accompliſhments of

the times ;—of ability and Courage equal to any ſituation, and capable by nature of the higheſt affairs; trained to arms, and poſſeſſing the tone, the deportment, and the manners of a gentleman ;—but yet theſe accompliſhments and advantages ſeem to hang looſe on him, and to be worn with a ſlovenly careleſſneſs and inattention : A too great indulgence of the qualities of humour and wit ſeems to draw him too much one way, and to deſtroy the grace and orderly arrangement of his other accompliſhments;—and hence he becomes ſtrongly marked for one advantage, to the injury, and almoſt forgetfulneſs in the beholder, of all the reſt. Some of his vices likewiſe ſtrike through, and ſtain his Exterior;—his modes of ſpeech betray a certain licentiouſneſs of mind; and that high Ariſtocratic tone which belonged to his ſituation was puſhed on, and aggravated into unfeeling inſolence and oppreſſion. "*It is not a confirmed brow*," ſays the Chief Juſtice,

Juſtice, "*nor the throng of words that come with* "*ſuch more than impudent ſaucineſs from you, can* "*thruſt me from a level conſideration :*" "*My lord,* anſwers *Falſtaff*, "*you call honourable boldneſs im-* "*pudent ſaucineſs. If a man will court'ſie and ſay* "*nothing, he is virtuous : No my lord, my humble* "*duty remembered, I will not be your ſuitor. I ſay* "*to you I deſire deliverance from theſe officers, being* "*upon haſty employment in the King's affairs.*" "*You ſpeak,* replies the Chief Juſtice, "*as hav-* "*ing power to do wrong.*"—His whole behaviour to the Chief Juſtice, whom he deſpairs of winning by flattery, is ſingularly inſolent; and the reader will remember many inſtances of his inſolence to others: Nor are his manners always free from the taint of vulgar ſociety; —"*This is the right fencing grace, my lord,*" (ſays he to the Chief Juſtice, with great impropriety of manners) "*tap for tap, and ſo part fair :*" "*Now* "*the lord lighten thee,*" is the reflection of the Chief Juſtice, "*thou art a very great fool.*"—

Such

Such a character as I have here deſcribed, ſtrengthened with that vigour, force, and alacrity of mind, of which he is poſſeſſed, muſt have ſpread terror and diſmay thro' the ignorant, the timid, the modeſt, and the weak: Yet is he however, when occaſion requires, capable of much accomodation and flattery;—and in order to obtain the protection and patronage of the great, ſo convenient to his vices and his poverty, he was put under the daily neceſſity of practiſing and improving theſe arts; a baſeneſs, which he compenſates to himſelf, like other unprincipled men, by an increaſe of inſolence towards his inferiors.—There is alſo a natural activity about *Falſtaff*, which for want of proper employment, ſhews itſelf in a kind of ſwell or buſtle, which ſeems to correſpond with his bulk, as if his mind had inflated his body, and demanded a habitation of no leſs circumference: Thus conditioned he rolls (in the language of *Oſſian*) like a *Whale of Ocean*, ſcattering the ſmaller fry; but affording

ing, in his turn, noble contention to *Hal* and *Poins*; who, to keep up the alluſion, I may be allowed on this occaſion to compare to the Threſher and the Sword-fiſh.

To this part of *Falſtaff*'s character, many things which he does and ſays, and which appear unaccountably natural, are to be referred.

We are next to ſee him *from within*: And here we ſhall behold him moſt villainouſly unprincipled and debauched; poſſeſſing indeed the ſame Courage and ability, yet ſtained with numerous vices, unſuited not only to his primary qualities, but to his age, corpulency, rank, and profeſſion;—reduced by theſe vices to a ſtate of dependence, yet reſolutely bent to indulge them at any price. Theſe vices have been already enumerated; they are many, and become ſtill more intolerable by an ex-

ceſs

ceſs of unfeeling inſolence on one hand, and of baſe accomodation on the other.

But what then, after all, is become of *old Jack?* Is this the jovial delightful companion—*Falſtaff*, the favourite and the boaſt of the Stage?—by no means. But it is, I think however, the *Falſtaff* of Nature; the very ſtuff out of which the *Stage Falſtaff* is compoſed; nor was it poſſible, I believe, out of any other materials he could have been formed. From this diſagreable draught we ſhall be able, I truſt, by a proper diſpoſition of light and ſhade, and from the influence and compreſſion of external things, to produce *plump Jack*, the life of humour, the ſpirit of pleaſantry, and the ſoul of mirth.

To this end, *Falſtaff* muſt no longer be conſidered as a ſingle independent character, but grouped, as we find him ſhewn to us in the Play;—his ability muſt be diſgraced by buffoonery,

buffoonery, and his Courage by circumſtances of imputation; and thoſe qualities be thereupon reduced into ſubjects of mirth and laughter:—His vices muſt be concealed at each end from vicious deſign and evil effect, and muſt thereupon be turned into incongruities, and aſſume the name of humour only;—his inſolence muſt be repreſſed by the ſuperior tone of *Hal* and *Poins*, and take the ſofter name of ſpirit only, or alacrity of mind;—his ſtate of dependence, his temper of accomodation, and his activity, muſt fall in preciſely with the indulgence of his humours; that is, he muſt thrive beſt and flatter moſt, by being extravagantly incongruous; and his own tendency, impelled by ſo much activity, will carry him with perfect eaſe and freedom to all the neceſſary exceſſes. But why, it may be aſked, ſhould incongruities recommend *Falſtaff* to the favour of the Prince?—Becauſe the Prince is ſuppoſed to poſſeſs a high reliſh of humour and

and to have a temper and a force about him, which, whatever was his purſuit, delighted in exceſs. This, *Falſtaff* is ſuppoſed perfectly to comprehend; and thereupon not only to indulge himſelf in all kinds of incongruity, but to lend out his own ſuperior wit and humour againſt himſelf, and to heighten the ridicule by all the tricks and arts of buffoonery for which his corpulence, his age, and ſituation, furniſh ſuch excellent materials. This compleats the Dramatic character of *Falſtaff*, and gives him that appearance of perfect good-nature, pleaſantry, mellowneſs, and hilarity of mind, for which we admire and almoſt love him, tho' we feel certain reſerves which forbid our going that length; the true reaſon of which is, that there will be always found a difference between mere appearances, and reality: Nor are we, nor can we be, inſenſible that whenever the action of external influence upon him is in whole or in part relaxed, the character reſtores itſelf

itſelf proportionably to its more unpleaſing condition.

A character really poſſeſſing the qualities which are on the ſtage imputed to *Falſtaff*, would be beſt ſhewn by its own natural energy; the leaſt compreſſion would diſorder it, and make us feel for it all the pain of ſympathy: It is the artificial condition of *Falſtaff* which is the ſource of our delight; we enjoy his diſtreſſes, we *gird at him* ourſelves, and urge the ſport without the leaſt alloy of compaſſion; and we give him, when the laugh is over, undeſerved credit for the pleaſure we enjoyed. If any one thinks that theſe obſervations are the effect of too much refinement, and that there was in truth more of chance in the caſe than of management or deſign, let him try his own luck;—perhaps he may draw out of the wheel of fortune a *Macbeth*, an *Othello*, a *Benedict*, or a *Falſtaff*.

Such

Such, I think, is the true character of this extraordinary buffoon; and from hence we may discern for what special purposes *Shakespeare* has given him talents and qualities, which were to be afterwards obscured, and perverted to ends opposite to their nature; it was clearly to furnish out a Stage buffoon of a peculiar sort; a kind of Game-bull which would stand the baiting thro' a hundred Plays, and produce equal sport, whether he is pinned down occasionally by *Hal* or *Poins*, or tosses such mongrils as *Bardolph*, or the Justices, sprawling in the air. There is in truth no such thing as totally demolishing *Falstaff*; he has so much of the invulnerable in his frame that no ridicule can destroy him; he is safe even in defeat, and seems to rise, like another *Antæus*, with recruited vigour from every fall; in this as in every other respect, unlike *Parolles* or *Bobadil*: They fall by the first shaft of ridicule, but *Falstaff* is a butt on which we may empty the whole quiver, whilst the substance

ſubſtance of his character remains unimpaired. His ill habits, and the accidents of age and corpulence, are no part of his eſſential conſtitution; they come forward indeed on our eye, and ſolicit our notice, but they are ſecond natures, not *firſt*; mere ſhadows, we purſue them in vain; *Falſtaff* himſelf has a diſtinct and ſeparate ſubſiſtence; he laughs at the chace, and when the ſport is over, gathers them with unruffled feather under his wing: And hence it is that he is made to undergo not one detection only, but a ſeries of detections; that he is not formed for one Play only, but was intended originally at leaſt for two; and the author we are told, was doubtful if he ſhould not extend him yet farther, and engage him in the wars with *France*. This he might well have done, for there is nothing periſhable in the nature of *Falſtaff*: He might have involved him, by the vicious part of his character, in new difficulties and unlucky ſituations, and have enabled

 him

him, by the better part, to have ſcrambled through, abiding and retorting the jeſts and laughter of every beholder.

But whatever we may be told concerning the intention of *Shakeſpeare* to extend this character farther, there is a manifeſt preparation near the end of the ſecond part of Henry IV. for his diſgrace: The diſguiſe is taken off, and he begins openly to pander to the exceſſes of the Prince, intitling himſelf to the character afterwards given him of being *the tutor and the feeder of his riots.* "*I will fetch* "*off,*" (ſays he) "*theſe Juſtices.—I will deviſe* "*matter enough out of this* Shallow *to keep the Prince* "*in continual laughter the wearing out of ſix* "*faſhions.—If the young* dace *be a bait for the* "*old* pike," (ſpeaking with reference to his own deſigns upon *Shallow*) "*I ſee no reaſon in* "*the law of nature but I may ſnap at him.*"—This is ſhewing himſelf abominably diſſolute: The laborious arts of fraud, which he practices

tices on *Shallow* to induce the loan of a thouſand pound, create *diſguſt*; and the more, as we are ſenſible this money was never likely to be *paid back*, as we are told that *was*, of which the travellers had been robbed. It is true we feel no pain for *Shallow*, he being a very bad character, as would fully appear, if he were unfolded; but *Falſtaff*'s deliberation in fraud is not on that account more excuſable.—The event of the old King's death draws him out almoſt into deteſtation.—"*Maſ-*
"*ter* Robert Shallow, *chuſe what office thou wilt*
"*in the land,—'tis thine.—I am fortune's ſteward.—*
"*Let us take any man's horſes.—The laws of Eng-*
"*land are at my commandment.—Happy are they*
"*who have been my friends;—and woe to my*
"Lord Chief Juſtice."—After this we ought not to complain if we ſee Poetic juſtice duly executed upon him, and that he is finally given up to ſhame and diſhonour.

But it is remarkable that, during this proceſs, we are not acquainted with the ſucceſs of *Falſtaff*'s deſigns upon *Shallow* 'till the moment of his diſgrace. "*If I had had time*," (ſays he to *Shallow*, as the King is approaching,) "*to have made new liveries, I would have beſtowed* "*the thouſand pounds I borrowed of you*;"—and the firſt word he utters after this period is, "*Maſter* Shallow, *I owe you a thouſand pounds*:" We may from hence very reaſonably preſume, that *Shakeſpeare* meant to connect this fraud with the puniſhment of *Falſtaff*, as a more avowed ground of cenſure and diſhonour: Nor ought the conſideration that this paſſage contains the moſt exquiſite comic humour and propriety in another view, to diminiſh the truth of this obſervation.

But however juſt it might be to demoliſh *Falſtaff* in this way, by opening to us his bad principles it was by no means *convenient*. If we had been to have ſeen a ſingle repreſentation

ſentation of him only, it might have been proper enough; but as he was to be ſhewn from night to night, and from age to age, the diſguſt ariſing from the *cloſe*, would by degrees have ſpread itſelf over the whole character; reference would be had throughout to his bad principles, and he would have become leſs acceptable as he was more known: And yet it was neceſſary to bring him, like all other ſtage characters, to ſome concluſion. Every play muſt be wound up by ſome event, which may ſhut in the characters and the action. If ſome *hero* obtains a crown, or a miſtreſs, involving therein the fortune of others, we are ſatisfied;—we do not deſire to be afterwards admitted of his council, or his bedchamber: Or if through jealouſy, cauſeleſs or well founded, *another* kills a beloved wife, and himſelf after,—there is no more to be ſaid;—they are dead, and there an end; Or if in the ſcenes of Comedy, parties are engaged, and plots formed, for the furthering

or preventing the completion of that great article Cuckoldom, we expect to be satisfied in the point as far as the nature of so nice a case will permit, or at least to see such a manifest *disposition* as will leave us in no doubt of the event. By the bye, I cannot but think that the Comic writers of the last age treated this matter as of more importance, and made more bustle about it, than the temper of the present times will well bear; and it is therefore to be hoped that the Dramatic authors of the present day, some of whom, to the best of my judgment, are deserving of great praise, will consider and treat this business, rather as a common and natural incident arising out of modern manners, than as worthy to be held forth as the great object and sole end of the Play.

But whatever be the question, or whatever the character, the curtain must not only be dropt before

before the eyes, but over the minds of the ſpectators, and nothing left for further examination and curioſity.—But how was this to be done in regard to *Falſtaff*? He was not involved in the fortune of the Play; he was engaged in no action which, as to him, was to be compleated; he had reference to no ſyſtem, he was attracted to no center; he paſſes thro' the Play as a lawleſs meteor, and we wiſh to know what courſe he is afterwards likely to take: He is detected and diſgraced, it is true; but he lives by detection, and thrives on diſgrace; and we are deſirous to ſee him detected and diſgraced again. The *Fleet* might be no bad ſcene of further amuſement;—he carries *all* within him, *and what matter* where, *if he be ſtill the ſame*, poſſeſſing the ſame force of mind, the ſame wit, and the ſame incongruity. This, *Shakeſpeare* was fully ſenſible of, and knew that this character could not be compleatly diſmiſſed but by death.—"Our "author, (ſays the Epilogue to the Second

"Part

"Part of Henry IV.) will continue the ſtory "with Sir *John* in it, and make you merry "with fair *Catherine* of *France*; where, for any "thing I know, *Falſtaff* ſhall dye of a ſweat, "unleſs already he be killed with your hard "opinions." If it had been prudent in *Shakeſpeare* to have killed *Falſtaff* with *hard opinion*, he had the means in his hand to effect it;—but dye, it ſeems, he muſt, in one form or another, and a *ſweat* would have been no unſuitable cataſtrophe. However we have reaſon to be ſatisfied as it is;—his death was worthy of his birth and of his life: "*He was born*, he ſays, "*about three o'clock in the afternoon with a white head, and ſomething a round belly.*" But if he came into the world in the evening with theſe marks of age, he departs out of it in the morning in all the follies and vanities of youth;—"*He was ſhaked* (we "are told) "*of a burning quotidian tertian*;—"*the young King had run bad humours on the* "*knight*;—*his heart was fractted and corroborate*;

"*and*

"*and a' parted juſt between twelve and one, even*
"*at the turning of the tide, yielding the crow a*
"*pudding, and paſſing directly into* Arthur's boſom,
"*if ever man went into the boſom of* Arthur."—
So ended this ſingular buffoon; and with him ends an Eſſay, on which the reader is left to beſtow what character he pleaſes: An Eſſay profeſſing to treat of the Courage of *Falſtaff*, but extending itſelf to his Whole character; to the arts and genius of his Poetic-Maker, SHAKESPEARE; and thro' him ſometimes, with ambitious aim, even to the principles of human nature itſelf.

THE END.

ERRATA.[1]

Page.	line.	
49,	8,	(in the notes) for *Henry* VI. read *Henry* IV.
50,	3,	(in the notes) correct the ſame error.
60,		the laſt but two in the notes, for be *this* when thou art dead—read—be *thus*, &c.
65,	13,	for the plains of *Sciola*—read—the plains of *Sciota*.
78,	9,	for *as* far—read—*ſo* far.
84,	14,	for *minching malicho*—read—*miching malicho*.
105,	6	and 7, for goes off the ſickly effort—read—goes off *in* the ſickly effort.
108,		the laſt but one, for *bare*—read—*baſe*.
109,	18,	for *circumſtances*—read—*circumſtance*.

In a few of the copies

172,	4,	for *the jovial delightful companion*—read—*Is this the jovial*, &c.

[1] [*Corrected in this reprint.*]

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